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# GLORIOUS EXPLOITS OF THE AIR

EDGAR MIDDLETON



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# **Glorious Exploits of the Air**





# Glorious Exploits of the Air

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## *Glorious Exploits of the Air*

*'Saw the Heavens fill with commerce,  
Argosies of magic sails,  
Pilots of the purple twilight  
Dropping down with costly bales.*

*Heard the Heavens fill with shouting,  
And there rained a ghastly dew  
From the Nation's airy navies  
Grappling in the Central blue.'*

TENNYSON.

# **The War Pilot in the Making**



## CHAPTER I

### The War Pilot in the Making

**T**HE startling feature of aviation is the development during three black years of war. We have seen the Flying Services spring up from a handful of ante-diluvian craft to the proudest and most efficient Corps of any nation in the world. We have had opened up a chapter of British history that no deeds of nineteen long centuries can rival. We have known the enemy without our doors, and death and destruction leaping down from the skies upon our capital. At last we are awake to the danger of this omnipotent phenomenon of the air.

It is not many years since the brothers Wright essayed a first flight on a frail gliding machine along the sand dunes of the western coast of the U.S.A., and Count Zeppelin experimented over the waters of Lake Constance. Then a flight in the air was an event of world-wide importance: to-day it is more than a daily occurrence, it is part and parcel of our existence. The number of craft and

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pilots must be within the hundred thousands. The venue extends from the Alps to Dover cliffs, from Dover to the lonely Shetlands, Mesopotamia, East Africa, India, Palestine, Salonica, across the reaches of the North Sea, and along the Mediterranean from Gibraltar to Alexandria, Alexandria through the Canal and the Red Sea to sun-baked Aden. The sun never sets over the British Flying Corps.

What mind could have pictured these happenings four years ago? London in the dark, dreary watches of the night, the sky ablaze with gleaming searchlights and bursting shrapnel; the muffled roar of the falling bombs, the terrifying hum of the giant craft, thousands of feet in the air above; the hordes of aircraft swarming, dawn and twilight, over the Flanders country, the desperate combats fought out among the clouds, while the battle rages unheeded on the ground below; that this great race of dauntless sailors was but a nation of intrepid airmen in disguise; and they, without exception, youths in their early twenties?

It is a youth-intoxicated profession, aviation. Young in years, but wise in the inherent lore of the century-old efforts of

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preceding generations. The successful effort has been built up from the accumulated experience of the past. It is a calling pertaining exclusively to the cool daring, the iron nerve, the reckless abandon of youth. Perhaps a little of the glamour and mock heroism of the early days has worn off, but the airman remains the darling of the gods. We are apt to regard him—and especially on active service—a knight errant of the twentieth century *sans peur et sans reproche*, unmindful of the fact that flying is as prosaic a business as is soldiering or seamanship.

Typical of this view there arrived one day, at a well-known naval aerodrome, a captain with a request for a flight. The pilot selected was a youth little past the blushing schoolboy stage. The senior officer, with a confidence peculiar to our island race, placed full trust in his youthful mentor, even to the matter of life and death. The day was ideal; the trip exhilarating. The passenger was profuse in his thanks, terminating the same with a graceful luncheon invitation for the following day. The invitation was accepted, on the one part at least, with a grateful fluttering of heart.

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They lunched *à deux*, in a cabin hung about with quaint trophies reminiscent of all quarters of the navigated globe, waited upon by a silent-footed, respectful marine. When the good things had been cleared away, a box of Corona-Corona was produced, and over their delightful fragrance they grew confidential. The captain, who wore on his breast a long string of decorations, honours of a grateful country, with an experience of men and matters that dated back many years, devoured the stories of this child of the skies with the eagerness and impetuosity of a midshipman. They were wonderful matters of the air that were herein related. And the visit closed with a mutual promise of correspondence which has never since relapsed.

From whence spring these youthful Valkyries of the air? The 'Shop' we are familiar with. Its efficiency was ably demonstrated in the hard-fought campaign of autumn 1914. Osborne and Dartmouth are powerful names to conjure with upon the seas. But the airman! His *alma mater* is the British Empire, his university the wise counsellings of the hoarse-voiced, capable warrant officers and N.C.O.'s trained in the school of long ex-

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perience. He is drawn from all ranks in life. A sprinkling of civilian aviators there were before the war, but they in number would furnish barely two squadrons: for the rest they were public-school boys, clerks, undergraduates, journalists, engineers, barristers, and every other walk and profession in our national life. Unused to, and entirely ignorant of the air, within three or four months they developed into efficient pilots. That is our airman of to-day.

There is a call in the air that stirs irresistibly some hitherto hidden chord in his heart. He is literally longing to try his wings. To see, to learn, to hear, to know are insufficient. He wants to do. For in the doing lies realisation; the air is before him, wide, clear, and seductive. That vampire voice whispers in his ear. He falls wholeheartedly to such seduction. He does not yet know that gentle tone is ever waiting to send the blood pulsing through his veins, the riot of madness to his head: his craft and his unwary self to destruction. He does not know because he has not learnt. That alone is possible in the hard school of experience.

Follows a strenuous period of apprentice-



## Glorious Exploits of the Air

ship. The new hand, or 'hun,' or 'quirk,' as he is styled in each respective Service, undergoes instruction in flying, banking, landing, 'straights,' solo flights, and the taking of his certificate, also in the many side-lines that are necessary to the education of a war flyer. Able to manœuvre his craft with dexterity, a pilot without knowledge of map-reading would find himself in a desperate position.

Numerous unpleasant adventures have been the outcome of this failing. An R.F.C. pilot setting out from somewhere in Kent ran into a dense bank of fog, and eventually landed in Norfolk. Unaccustomed to the broad dialect of the natives he imagined he had found his way across Channel and landed in the German lines. And only when about to fire his machine did he discover his happy mistake. Another affair of the same nature was the cause of numerous questions in the House of Commons, and concerned an aeroplane of the latest type that had been flown across to France, and landed in the enemy's country on its first trip.

Aerial gunnery is of the utmost importance on the other side. An aeroplane badly armed or unarmed is useless. The airman must know

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how to use his weapons to the best advantage, and be a good and accurate shot. Failing this, he is at the mercy of the first enemy fighting machine that comes along. In one instance a pilot had taken up an untrained observer for reconnaissance, and was homeward bound when they were intercepted by a double-engined Hun battleplane. The latter closed in, firing rapidly. But no reply came from our machine. The observer was unable to handle his Lewis gun, and only by clever manœuvring did the pilot save his machine and crew from destruction.

But more important than all to the would-be airman is self-control. The youngster who visions only the kudos and the excitement, with never a thought to danger and risk, will soon be grievously disillusioned. He will learn that he requires all his wits and nerve to bring his craft and himself safely to roost again. Otherwise—— We have the other side of the picture so vividly expressed by a cutting from an early war number of the *Morning Post*. Appearing in the form of a letter, it read after this fashion: ‘Sir,—Last week in Belgium I saw a wrecked British aeroplane and beside it the grave of the aviator. At the time I was a prisoner with the Germans,

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and could not stop or ask questions. Later, with the object of establishing the identity of the aviator, I visited the place. Should, after the war, the family of the aviator desire to remove his body, I am writing this that they may know where it is now buried.

‘The aeroplane fell close to the road between Enghien and Ath. Belgians near the place told me the officer was shot down by a column of German infantry, the strength of which column he was evidently trying to discover. The aeroplane was totally destroyed, but on a twisted plate I found the words: “Avro Manufacturing Company, Manchester, England.” There was also in the wreck paper forms for making out reports on reconnaissance. There was no writing on these, but the printed matter was English.

‘At the head of the grave the Germans had put a wooden cross, on which they had written: “Herr Flier, August 22nd, 1914.” The Belgians had covered the grave with flowers. It should not be difficult to find. It is on the left-hand side of the road as one walks from Enghien to Ath, in a pear orchard near a very old red-brick house with a square tower. One hundred yards south of the grave is a signpost that reads, pointing

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south, "Ath—14 kil." Pointing north, "Enghien—5 kil." Enghien is about thirty kilometres south of Brussels.—Yours &c.'

Imagine the situation. There is a sudden burst of smoke and flame, somewhere close at hand. The machine rocks over at a terrifying angle. The pilot has been hit, and is lying huddled-up over his 'joy-stick.' The nose of the aeroplane plunges downward, down and down. The wind whistles past. The earth rises up to meet one in a terrifying manner. Minute details of one's past career flash through the mind, and then darkness, oblivion! These are the feelings experienced by an air pilot brought down thousands of feet to earth by a bursting 'Archie.'

Every day similar incidents occur at the front, not once, but many times. And the narrow escapes these daring airmen encounter from a certain and awful death provide the most thrilling reading matter of the war.

One instance is recorded of a Royal Flying Corps pilot, reconnaissance bound, one summer's morning, who was hit by shrapnel at nine thousand feet. Three or four bullets pierced the petrol tank, while others contrived successfully to dislocate

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the engine. The latter 'konked.' Down went the aeroplane. Two thousand feet lower another 'Archie' found the pilot, and rendered him *hors de combat*. The next thing he was conscious of, was that he was lying in a base hospital, with a piece of shrapnel in his arm. By a miracle of good fortune the machine had righted herself when still five hundred feet up, and had ended her mad career by plunging into a narrow field, bordered by stout hedges, and wedged therein firm and secure.

A brother pilot returning from a raid, and still twenty-five miles from his aerodrome, received a burst in the side of the fusilage of the machine that shattered his left thigh. He fainted. The machine got out of control. Desperate efforts on the part of the observer failed to right her. The pilot came too, feebly opened his eyes, then relapsed again. There followed a steep nose-dive of over five thousand feet. The observer was prepared for the worst, when, to his astonishment, the machine began to right herself. Turning, he discovered that the rush of upward air had brought the pilot round, and he was now making desperate efforts to carry on. He succeeded, eventually,

## The War Pilot in the Making

in making his base. But, *en route*, he fainted no fewer than five times, and each time down went the machine. They came to the lines, and, with a last desperate effort, he crossed above shell range, and made a graceful landing in his own aerodrome. A fortnight later this very gallant pilot succumbed to septic poisoning.



# Point of View





## CHAPTER II

### Point of View

**W**HEN one remembers that the Iron Duke had, perforce, to make his fretful way to war on a lumbering pair-horse stage-coach and a prancing brig, and that Kitchener himself could do no better than a motor-car and a rolling Destroyer, it gives one a certain feeling of superiority, of splendid isolation; well conspicuous over the earth, and in an unimpeded air-way; low enough to be comfortably apprehensive of enemy sea craft and land batteries, and high enough to treat the Channel shipping with pre-historic disdain.

But one cannot wander through the Channel like Hyde Park. There are all kinds of inquisitive and diligent hecklers to lay storm to the airman's passage. From the Foreland to the Nore the wireless wizards will be scandalising one in most effective dots and dashes, with anti-aircraft muzzles to clinch all unnecessary argument and a rule and regulation tariff as hide-bound as Whitehall itself.

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Being a dutiful, skin-fearful pilot, one reports first to F—— after the manner of a long swoop across a determinedly uncomfortable surface, a cursory quick-fire dialogue with two perspiring mechanics, and—if low in spirits—an added gallon of petrol, and then away to St. Somewhere in France.

Far below the water glitters in the spring sunlight. To the left lies a large naval port, with groups of broad-beamed monitors, destroyer sleuths, and disdainful cruisers; grouped together like food-satiated pigeons without the Guildhall.

One feels uncomfortably that the eyes of all aboard are focussed upon one—in reality they are below decks discussing nautical law and cocktails. At least one escapes seasickness.

It is only a short run across to C——, where a similar reporting visit must be undertaken. So short that an R.F.C. pilot recently made the flight from F—— to St. Somewhere and back, before lunch, on two different machines, and repeated the performance before soup at seven.

On a new and powerful machine a brother pilot encountered two marauding Huns returning from a successful raid, and rendered it slightly less successful.

## Point of View

But these are adventures by the way. The average only run to sea-fog and low petrol. And not until one has recovered somewhat from the peaceful disillusionment of R.F.C. Headquarters in B.E.F. comes the first tastes of shrapnel and of 'Archie.'

The lesson of war-flying may be learnt in three stages. The time and experience required differ according to personality. The aeroplane is the strangest of strange beasts. I use beast meaningly. For perverse habits she excels even fair woman. For moods, a high bred race-horse is a dove in comparison. To understand these habits, to humour these moods, is an education in itself. War conditions tend to make the matter even more difficult. To affect a continuous 'hide and seek' with persistent 'Archies,' to side-step heavy howitzer shells, and to manœuvre his machine successfully, occupies the best of the best pilot's time. To his gymnastical accomplishments he is expected to add the virtues of a navigator and an operator of wireless: the vices of an expert machine-gunner. There, in fact and reality, is the identity shrouded in the 'our airmen' of the daily Official.

But, concerning his work—the daring

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flights and hairbreadth escapes that make war-flying worth the while—he is strangely, more, disobligingly reticent. The mud-grimed infantryman in the trenches is the man for our matter. He has almost every story of the air by heart. Did he not see, with his own bloomin' eyes, Captain X—— bomb the enemy battery at B——; and Z—— pull his machine out of the very jaws of death, after nose-diving down almost on to the German front-line trenches at M——?

That being the case he will tell you, with all the impetuosity and arrogance of the authority, of one cool scout who, after accounting for two enemy aeroplanes within an hour, found that both ammunition and petrol had run out. Down he came to his aerodrome, reloaded and refilled, and within half an hour of his again taking the air had bagged his third machine. The most confirmed home grumbler must change his favourite topic of conversation after that.

In the very early days of the war, when pilotage was as primitive as machines were unreliable, a French pilot swooped down to within five hundred feet of the enemy country, to insure accuracy of reconnaissance.

## Point of View

At that unpleasantly low altitude his engine suddenly 'petered out.' Down he came with a run. Not a German was in sight. He hurriedly set fire to his machine as he caught the sound of hoof-beats behind him. He wheeled, to find a squadron of Uhlans galloping towards him. With his back to the now blazing plane, his revolver in hand, and with set face he awaited the coming onslaught. Two shots rang out in rapid succession. The haughty Hun at the head dived over his horse's head—a bullet through his heart. Quick as thought, the Frenchman seized the riderless horse, and, jumping into the saddle, made off rapidly across country to his own lines.

Another pilot, a Britisher on this occasion, swooped down upon a body of Uhlans, and, with a single tray of ammunition, put the entire squadron to flight.

These then are the kind of adventures a pilot has to face across the way, but they are mere child's play compared to the battle with self. Flying temperament is a strange composite. Nerves—not in the generally understood term—play more than a small part in 'flying life.' The strain is tremendous, but, strange to say, not felt at the time. It is

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after eighteen months or two years that they first become apparent.

Favourite little tricks in mid-air become a matter of hardship where formerly they were a pleasure. There is a loss of confidence, a sense of uncontrollable fear; a longing never again to leave the safety of earth's surface. It is the end of a man's flying life. Henceforth he must be content to look on, while new blood learns what he has long since forgotten.

Other men are temperamentally unfitted from the start. Fearful of no danger on their feet, for them the air premises untold horrors.

To a certain war area aerodrome there came a major of artillery with a polite request for a flight. He was a seasoned warrior of many campaigns, and proud owner of a coveted D.S.O., granted for a supremely daring act in saving his guns from a tight corner in South Africa. He 'had taken great interest in aviation from the early days,' he volunteered, and 'would now much like to experience the sensation.'

The pilot selected was perhaps somewhat of a trickster, and vain enough to give his passenger some idea of what *could* be accom-

## Point of View

plished with a modern aeroplane. However, when they landed again, the major sat wordless and motionless in his seat with white face. And, eventually, when he did recover himself, he swore that never again would he go up in the air if he could help it.

On the other hand, I have known men, quiet, undemonstrative individuals, preferring their own company to others, who thought no more of sitting in an aeroplane over a shrapnel barrage than they did of sitting in their morning bath. One man in particular whiled away the tween-whiles chewing milk chocolate and munching apples. On dull days he would do his correspondence on his observation block. And, on one occasion, after narrowly escaping death from bursting 'Archies,' he sat and calmly snapped the flying shrapnel with a hand-camera.

There are others. Parachuting as a hobby hardly recommends itself to the average mind. To one R.F.C. pilot it was a pastime for most sunny mornings. And alarmed householders in a certain suburb of London grew quite accustomed to seeing him drop into their back gardens.

But our pilot in embryo has by this time—it must not be forgotten we have skipped



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ten days in the interval—accustomed himself, more or less, to war conditions. If he has not actually traversed the lines, he has already been near them, either for cross-country or for formation practice.

When the great day of the first reconnaissance arrives, he is all eagerness to be off. This impetuosity diminishes with experience. Creeping away in the coldest of cold grey dawns he is off, and away. The tiny unit moving fly-fashion against and above the military check board extending from here to the base, a sleepy, old-world town built into the slope of hill; dipping down easily to a sluggish river; a collection of grey-slate roofs, and a broad, steel road leading on and on to the dim obscurity of the battle area.

Here France is as peacefully rural as remote Wales. Fields, more fields; wheat in full ear, green root stretches. Nestled in the lee-side of a wood, a group of bell tents; a streak of water that glitters blue in the sunlight. The long, monotonously direct road *choc-à-bloc* with traffic. Piccadilly at its busiest could send up no greater shower of dust and fumes. A giant gun on a limber hauled by a puffing 'Billy' is to the fore; a company of infantry marching back

## Point of View

to billets; lorries, ambulances, cavalry, motor-cycles, cars.

Nearer to the lines, and at higher altitude, the country unfolds itself mile by mile on all sides; perhaps a little indistinct, but sufficient to ensure accuracy for topographical purposes. The network of the modern army in the field is strikingly obvious—the apex of the triangle at General Headquarters to Divisional Headquarters, and Brigade Headquarters to grey, erratic trenches, and sinister groups of heavy guns. The infantry giant fights almost blindfolded. The airman gives him sight, and indulges in a little combat on his own account.

The first shrapnel is unpleasant, but fascinating, and gruesome for evermore. Again it is largely a matter of experience. LUCK is a word writ large in the lexicon of aviation, and Fortune is ever a capricious jade.

Once he has his air-legs there is little the 'hun' or 'quirk'—Service terms for beginners—does not feel himself capable of tackling, and he does it deucedly well too.

The sporting instinct—basely derided and, therefore, appreciated by the enemy—makes him keen to get ahead of his fellows.

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Such determination shows up pleasantly through the prosaic everyday routine.

Perhaps the best example was that of a young pilot, photography bound. Accurate pictures were required of a certain danger area. The camera supplied was the latest, with a delicate apparatus which, by merely pulling a string, changed the plates and reset the shutter.

Through a cloud of bursting shrapnel and H.E. he flew up and down that area no less than sixteen times, pulling the string upon each occasion.

When he returned to his base, he found to his chagrin that the first plate had jammed, and totally ruined the remainder. He wasted no time in complaining, but promptly got out a fresh aeroplane, went up again, and obtained his photographs.

# Wisdom of the Clouds



## CHAPTER III

### Wisdom of the Clouds

**D**AWN. The word conjures up all manner of conflicting emotions to the mind of the air pilot on active service. Chill, bleak aerodomes; snorting, purring aeroplanes; dim figures of mechanics hurrying hither and thither in the enshrouding darkness; a half-conscious disappreciation of woefully official orders. To any pessimist seeking atmosphere, any author copy, it can safely be recommended.

The flying day varies with atmospherical conditions and annual seasons. Summer days it ranges from fourteen to seventeen hours, to four and seven hours in winter. Wind, rain, and storm that, in 1914, were sufficient to deter aviation are now no longer regarded as obstacles. As witness the daily Official one day, 'Despite inclement weather there was considerable activity in the air, and' &c.; another, 'Though the weather has been extremely unsettled, our pilots have been busy.'

Dawn and twilight are the fashionable

## Glorious Exploits of the Air

flying hours. Why not the afternoon is and will always remain one of those official mysteries.

Then picture a lean stretch of moderately level meadow land, at the base of a mist-hidden range of hills, Somewhere in Somewhere. The great doors of the hangars are already agape. The aerial birds have hopped from off their night perches, and are now being preened in the semi-darkness, preparatory to flight.

With an eerie, nerve-wracking roar that splits the darkness in twain, and echoes and re-echoes round the roofs of the sheds, Number One announces her intention to be off. Almost immediately she is joined by similar whirring chimes from different parts of the ground, as battle-, bi-, and tri-planes take up the unearthly chorus.

As if a premeditated signal or a polite reminder, it brings leather clad, eleventh hour figures scurrying from the direction of the officers' quarters.

In the centre of the open space stands a flight of reconnaissance craft, comfortable and cumbrous of appearance. A brief conference between the pilots and the observers and they slip off, one by one, into the sur-

## Wisdom of the Clouds

rounding haze, followed immediately by two fleet battleplanes for convoy.

Other craft of the latter type go off singly at odd intervals, and in all directions. Theirs is a roving commission, and the plans of the pilot are entrusted to no other ears than those of his silent voiced machine-gun, who barks his appreciation at the first suitable opportunity.

There is not much of the parade element about the affair. Nor is any intended. Orders have been given overnight, and no time is wasted upon such idle fripperies at the dawn.

The evening dinner table is more often than not the first meeting-place of the day, and, at the same time, the most tragic moment. Then, for the first time, the vacant seats will be conspicuous. Concerning them no word is spoken, no question asked. But a silent sympathy pervades the meal, and the conversation lags at thoughtful moments. The gap, however, will soon be filled. A fresh face will make its appearance. And so the war in the air goes on.

Of all the numerous side-lines of the art of flying, reconnaissance and combat are the 'star' turns. Particularly the latter, as it covers so wide a scope of activities.



## Glorious Exploits of the Air

The battleplane is a roaring giant that eschews low altitudes, and loves cloud fringes from whence he can hover, and keep always a wicked eye roaming for slower craft below. Almost own cousin to him is the triplane. His habits are pushful, and alarming to behold. Like an elevator he will rise up into the air, and, before one has time to turn, will have disappeared across the sky-line. The fighting 'bullet' slithers away with an apologetic whirr, and lands again, daintily as a cat. The craft that roams the low altitudes is that reconnaissance bound, and he is at the mercy of all other and speedier craft. He is the jack of all trades. The 'hewer of wood, and the drawer of water.'

Out at all times and in all weathers he will be ordered to report on a troublesome sector of the enemy lines, or a rakish battery group; to take photographs of Hun trenches; to 'sit' over an anti-aircraft barrage, sizzling wireless reports of shell bursts back to our own artillery.

Dawn finds him at his best. Should we say, more truly, that he anticipates the dawn. For, before Morning has flung the stone into the Bowl of Night, heavy-eyed mechanics are already feeding him up with oil and

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petrol. And before the legitimate rising of the lark he has risen, and is racing across the sombre heavens.

Aboard there is space enough for two, pilot and observer, with a reserve tank for petrol. The latter commences to unwind his wireless aerial, and prepare his observation report block, as the dawn breaks. On second thought, breaks is an unfortunate simile. From the air it appears as though the lid had suddenly been raised from off a gigantic dish, and the young and tender light comes flooding in beneath the rims: lighting up first the crest of the arc, then sinking gradually lower, and wrestling with the grey mists of the surface. With it sweep in crisp, vivifying gusts of air that fill the lungs, warm the blood, and flood the mind with thoughts of mad adventure. Observation at this period is apt to be inaccurate.

Unfolds mile upon mile of the surface of the earth; roads, rivers, camps, ammunition dumps, artillery groups, and trenches; to the uninitiated as puzzling as a Chinese Grammar. But the observer knows. Every twenty-four hours of fine weather he is out spying the acres and roads behind the enemy lines. He knows Y—, and X—, and

## Glorious Exploits of the Air

Z—, across the lines, as well as you and I, reader, know Piccadilly and the Strand. That strange black smudge—there, on the horizon to the left—must be a group of heavy artillery; that vein across a far-below meadow to a ruined farm-house points the probability of a new German Headquarters; that obvious group of gun muzzles a clever trap; those strange wheel markings on an adjacent meadow another.

But now he is busy with pencil and with paper. Ten thousand feet he enters: time, five twenty-seven A.M., observed two trains proceeding to M—, evidently carrying troops. Five forty-five, unusual activity observed behind A—, on main road leading W.S.W.

'Archie' pays his usual call, and makes himself, as usual, highly unbearable. He is practically ignored. More important work is to hand. The observer leans slightly over the side, his glasses screwed to his eyes, sweeping, roaming, now this way, now that.

The pilot meanwhile is not idle. There is the matter of self-defence to be considered. Those low-hanging clouds on the left, what do they screen? He pictures to himself enemy battleplanes innumerable, and curses

## Wisdom of the Clouds

his own squadrons for conspicuous absence when required.

Presently will be recorded by the observer that, south of C—, two enemy battalions were observed moving towards X—; extended cavalry movement at L—; roads *choc-à-bloc* with motor transport at S—. Not much there is that escapes his eye, and does not find further confirmation in the terse, official language of his report.

Later he asks the pilot—by way of hastily scrawled note—to go lower. Down and down they sink, further and further into the clouds of bursting shrapnel—the ‘*coup*’ of the week. Beneath a screen of overhanging branches and greenery he has detected the new emplacement of a 17-inch howitzer, with artillery men working feverishly on either side.

Obvious it is that this must be a ‘line’ reconnaissance, which necessitates flying and observing along a line between two given points on the map, these points having been marked in prior to leaving the ground. The only other form possible is area reconnaissance, which comprises the observation of an entire area or district.

The importance of their being nothing

## Glorious Exploits of the Air

to report cannot be too strongly emphasised. It is the most significant aspect of all. Typical, one sunny summer's morning there landed at an aerodrome on the Western front a war weary observer with a complaint of 'nothing doing in the enemy country.' A quick-witted captain of staff seized the opportunity with the celerity of a dog after a new bone. Within an hour, two other reconnaissance craft were speeding over the quietened area. Within a day the report of an extended enemy movement in this particular sector was to hand. Within forty-eight hours a fierce and gigantic battle was raging. And, within an ace of fortune, our infantry were saved from a nasty surprise.

The work of the aerial observer in the war cannot be too highly praised. He is a man of many parts: map-reader, machine gunner, wireless operator, photographer, navigator. For him the nerve strain—of placing his life unreservedly in the hands of another man in this most ticklish of enterprise—is greater than it is for the pilot. Dangers and adventures they share alike. Yet, when any great feat is accomplished, the pilot gets all the kudos, the observer rarely ever. Why is this, when one reads

## Wisdom of the Clouds

of such deeds as that accomplished by one solitary observation squadron, who were responsible in one solitary day for silencing seventy-two of the enemy batteries, composed of 288 guns in all?

Other deeds there are that filter through occasionally by medium of the Official reports, giving us other issues of the matter, as, 'Six of our machines failed to return to-day.' That sort of phrase grows wearisome of repetition. It leaves the imagination rampant with fancies of a thousand and one adventures befallen the gallant pilots and observers. Not abandoned in a mid-ocean of air were those six: to be discovered six years later rust-eaten and dilapidated, a menace to the commercial fairway. Every one must have crashed down somewhere in hill or valley, wood or field behind the lines. Perhaps a few days hence there will fall from the clouds a courteous note from the enemy: 'So-and-so a prisoner at X——'; 'Y—— well and unhurt'; or a bundle of personal trinkets that adumbrate the tragedy so poignantly in their own inanimate silence. Of those that return in safety to their bases: what of their crowded hour or so? How often have they stood on the brink, when

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human fate hung on the bare two-inch yank of the 'joy-stick'? If they were gifted with narration their personal recollections would be thrilling enough to supply every adventure book in every library of the world.

Some five miles behind the lines one of our machines is seen suddenly to dive for the ground. Two hundred feet up she is nosed out, and, missing a group of farm buildings by a wing tip, lands in a meadow beside the road. The observer and the soldier spectators who have hurried to the scene lift the pilot out, and gently lay him on the ground. His right leg is shattered above the knee by a bullet, and will not lie straight upon the grass. His face is blood stained and set; but only by an occasional twitch of the lips does he betray the agony he endures. His first inquiry is for a cigarette. The plane stands in the background with shrapnel pierced wings and bullet-peppered body. Smiling gratefully at the unspoken sympathy of his comrades, the pilot smokes his cigarette, and carries on. This is a scene that is being enacted every day, not once, but many times, somewhere along the various fronts. But of it we hear no word, because the pilot thinks it not worth while.

## Wisdom of the Clouds

Adventure. It is the ever waking and sleeping thought of the pilot on active service. After a flight or so over there he can no longer be credulous. If he ran into a cloud and found it solid as Well's moon, he would put her down, and make his landing without further hesitation. He is prepared for anything. In one instance a pilot of one of our battleplanes, told off to convoy a reconnaissance machine, somehow got separated from her in mid-air. Then he found her, round the tail of a cloud; she was in the midst of a swarm of enemy fighting craft, fighting for dear life. He dived at the nearest Hun, and soon sent him to earth, then turned to aid his consort. Down into the thick of the scrap he plunged, to find the unfortunate spotter writhing under a hail of bullets, but still game.

As she passed below him, he was aware of a most extraordinary apparition. Huddled up in the cockpit of the machine lay the observer, while the pilot was sitting bolt upright in his seat, making off rapidly for home, and, as though in a last idea of derision, had his fingers to his nose in the direction of the enemy machines. Shortly after he landed inside our lines, and, though



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safe himself, the unfortunate observer was already dead.

Similar deeds are taking place at all hours at the front, through the long day from early dawn to the late twilight. Then the aeroplanes seek home, after the fashion of the other denizens of the sky.

To describe that scene adequately, we will borrow a page out of the note-book of Beach-Thomas, the brilliant war correspondent of the *Daily Mail*:—‘At sunset yesterday I went to a big aerodrome to see the birds come home to roost. The ground was almost empty and the air almost full. Our fighting patrols had failed to find a single enemy, though they had sought far and wide. Full of unexhausted vitality they expended it in playing every imaginable trick. They turned somersaults, spinning headlong in twisting tumble like a blown leaf; they looped and flew on their backs: and played hide and seek with trees, and swooped like hawks and skimmed like swallows, and towered like cranes, and drummed like snipe. It was all training for battle, and this evening all was well, for every bird had come home to roost.’

# 'Across the Firing Lines

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## CHAPTER IV

### Across the Firing Lines

**D**OWN on the Somme they tell one of a British airman, out for his first flight 'across,' who happened upon a fiercely raging aerial battle. For a moment he hesitated, uncertain of that wheeling, slithering *mêlée* of wings and struts, seeking vainly for the tell-tale iron crosses on a possible tail. While he held the fringes of the fight, a reserve squadron of enemy craft took him in the rear. With Huns on every side, and in the midst of an incessant shower of machine-gun bullets, he attempted that most dangerous of aerial tricks, a 'spin.' Round and round flew the machine with sickening rapidity. Then she dived.

At two thousand feet he straightened himself. As he did, so two battered enemy machines plunged past him. Without hesitation he followed and bombed them to flaming wrecks. Then he climbed aloft again as a diving, helpless enemy craft scraped him by inches, and crashed into the ground. He concluded his 'uneventful' morning with

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downing a giant enemy double engine craft.

Near Ypres, over the Censored Hill, and near St. Somewhere, another R.F.C. pilot, a young-old experienced hand on this occasion, bound on a roving commission against fighting Huns, received a flying shrapnel fragment in an inconvenient portion of his engine. Mechanical wise she protested — volubly. With a rapid mental calculation, and a sport subscribed extenuation, he figured that he could do another thirty minutes at reduced speed. Almost immediately a Hun battleplane hovered before him. He eyed the British lines for a possible landing-place and closed. Possibly with one sharp burst he could bring the enemy down, and with a sharper burst reach home again. He drove at the enemy head-on. The German unused to these mad tactics lost his nerve, and dipped underneath. Like a flash our man sloped down, and streaked for home, every second expecting pursuit, and agreeably surprised on nearing the ground to see the enemy crash near by. And this was not the end of his experience of thunderbolts. For, jumping from his machine, he ran to the enemy aeroplane to find the

## Across the Firing Lines

pilot with five bullets through his heart.

At Messines occurred a yet more remarkable affair. Happened the second day of the battle—or was it the third?—a reconnaissance craft, with pilot and observer aboard, was hit and damaged by a bursting 'Archie,' and the pilot had, perforce, to make a forced landing in the enemy's country. This feat was observed by the pilot of another of our machines, who happened to be overhead at the time, and who also noticed that one of the occupants clambered out of the damaged machine, and supporting his companion, who had been wounded, made off into a near-by wood, and there disappeared, to be given up for lost.

Three days later, they were discovered by our advancing infantry, hiding in a dug-out, it having since been ascertained that the plane descended immediately after the order for retreat had been given to the neighbouring Hun forces, and that they had been far too busy about their own business to give our men a thought.

Truly there is now another world above this twenty century old, old world of ours. A British Navy rules the clouds. The new

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Navy, a new race of men, with new craft, find a home in this new world. And their manners, their precedents, their customs, their ideals are altogether new, and altogether delightful. Their harbours are green, pleasant meadow lands. Their highways are greater than the sea, by exactly five continents. Their dangers and adventures lie, in like fashion, in the treacherous winds that shriek up from all the corners of the earth: in storm and cloud.

A super schoolboy is officer in command of H.M.S. Aeroplane; another determined and boisterous youth his assistant. Vested with power to wreck the half of a city, to change the tide of a mighty battle, to push the frontiers of Empire to earth's utmost limits, confidence in them is never misplaced.

The Navy of the air sails out from harbour after the fashion of the Navy of the sea. Note that squadron off for a bombing raid. See the line formation: the heavy cruiser bombers, with the destroyer scouts in skirting protection. Back in the silent North Sea, at the same hour, and in the same way they are performing the same manœuvre. That tiny Bristol Bullet, slithering off single

## Across the Firing Lines

handed. Have you, reader, ever seen the long, grey periscope of one of H.M.'s submarines disappearing from port? There you have the same sensation. The sinister enemy airships that visit our coasts in the silent watches of the night: their formation is similar to the line of haughty Dreadnoughts taking the seas. The slow and cumbrous observation and photography craft are the merchantmen of the air. And it must be realised that one of these craft, whether British or German, can do little or nothing before the attacks of the more war-like flotillas of battleplanes.

Formation—formation of aircraft is now a familiar phrase to readers of battle stories. Recently there occurred a little enterprise connected with the capturing of a strongly fortified wooded position. Behind the wood the Prussian Guard had been massed to resist the movements of our infantry. Upon this being made known, a formation was immediately given orders to attack them *en masse* with hand-grenades and bombs. It was an entirely unprecedented manœuvre. Sweeping low, in precise formation, they got to within two thousand feet. Then the enemy opened rapid fire. We retaliated. The



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carnage was indescribable. For a moment or so they stuck it, then broke, and plunged in all directions. The C——s and the G——s nipping in at the opportune moment gave the affair the necessary finishing touch.

Then well might Sir Douglas Haig pay tribute:—‘The pilots have shown energy, gallantry, and initiative, and have proved themselves capable of hard work and hard fighting. Further, the machines with which they are provided have undoubtedly helped largely towards the success of the aerial fighting which has taken place this spring on the front of the British Armies in France.’

All three of the exploited qualities manifested in a certain incident that occurred somewhere in the East. Unlike the Western Front, the British Forces in those parts were, none too well equipped with aircraft. And, one day, there hovered across the sky-line a squadron of Hun bombing machines—big fellows with three and four machine-guns apiece. Up went three solitary British single seaters to encounter them. At the first onset two of our machines were shot down. The survivor carried on in highly approved British manner. From below, the position appeared hopeless. But our man evinced

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brains as well as courage. Diving at a terrifying angle he plunged into the midst of the enemy squadron—where they were unable to fire for a certain possibility of hitting one another—and calmly proceeded to force one big fellow to the earth. Keeping well in his wash he was again enabled to prevent the enemy from firing, and added to his bag a brand new battleplane, pilot, and observer.

Meanwhile the remainder proceeded with their bombing expedition. But on their return they found their daring opponent again awaiting them. Now free from the weight of their bombs they made no show of giving fight, but made off as rapidly as possible. For their pains yet another battleplane 'bit the dust.'

Most aerial efforts of to-day are solo affairs. That, however, does not detract one whit from their daring and enjoyable qualities. These solo merchants who parade the skies in wet and shine make history with the rapidity of the flight of their machines: in their tussles with the enemy craft, and the not-to-be-wondered-at-duel with the enemy anti-aircraft guns.

It is a sunny, windless morning. Along the aerodrome are stretched the forms of

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seven graceful scouting craft, and two clumsy gun buses. Already bestrapped and begoggled, the pilot of one of the machines is bandying words with a crony alongside.

'The brutes hit me at twelve thousand yesterday, but I'll take jolly good care they don't touch me again,' he says.

'How are you going to avoid it?' asked the friend.

'Go up to fifteen thousand and stay there,' is the reply.

'I wouldn't,' the friend counsels. 'Stick to the others. That's the safest plan.'

The pilot shakes his head vehemently. The friend shrugs his shoulders, and they are off.

With the twilight they return, one after another, speeding their way out of a heavy bank of clouds. But there are now only eight dark specks. Who is down? Speculation runs high. At last the first man lands—they crowd round him breathlessly. 'B——,' he exclaims. 'He would go up to fifteen thousand and got plugged, the rest of us came through at eight untouched.' Then to reassure them, 'It's all right, though, he's landed in Holland.'

Wrote a flying friend from France the

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other week: 'How our Hunnish friends must have cursed our aircraft during those first few days. It is said that it was mainly due to the accuracy of our observation that such havoc was created by our heavy artillery. As one pilot said, he was surprised upon returning from an arduous bout of artillery fire direction to be complimented vociferously by a ruddy-cheeked, corpulent major of the R.F.A. Praise is always so acceptable when entirely unexpected.

'Since then we have moved, or, to be more precise, are moved—units never have things, they always are things. The enemy by a wise retirement has placed at our disposal several more appropriate sites further on. So I have departed from the home of many weary months to other climes. And should there be any war-eager youth in search of a pleasing country residence with a southern aspect, I can safely recommend him my old dug-out. I had dreams about that dug-out, with roses round the door, and my grandchildren, of the War Babies Battalion, grouped about my knees, before the porch, on warm summer evenings. And, now, alas, I can only add, that it has every convenience. bath hot and cold, is within

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easy reach of the firing line, and bullets and bombs pass the door every few minutes.

'The first adventure that befell me after leaving my old home was an encounter with a Boche reconnaissance machine. It was a short, sharp, and, for me, sweet incident. Coming up with him at about eight thousand I closed in, and half looped. He dived, I followed suit. Down and down we went to just over four thousand. Then, as Sir George Robey of Bing might remark, I clicked. With my fifteenth round I got him well in the nethermost parts, and he plunged earthwards, leaving behind a wide trail of blue smoke.

'My next adventure was of a somewhat curious nature. Curious, I say, from a remembrance of a phrase culled long ago from a book of psychology. Said the author of that excellent volume: "Our inner faculties are adapted in advance to the features of the world in which we dwell, so as to secure our safety and prosperity in its midst." It was one of these self-same faculties that undoubtedly saved my life upon this occasion. Passing out of a thick bank of cloud I found three Hun machines bearing down on top of me. I dived to gain speed, but the enemy still kept on, and it was not until just over

## Across the Firing Lines

two hundred feet from the ground that I was able to elude their attentions. Then, turning her nose, more by impulse than intention, I climbed up into the midst of them. The manœuvre was unexpected, and took them completely by surprise.

‘Now one lay slightly above me, and one to the left. With the latter I closed in, and turning behind him I was able to get the pilot’s head on the range finder. One drum of cartridges was all that was necessary to polish him off, and meanwhile his two companions had disappeared.

‘On the homeward journey—But there. I think that sufficient for a first attempt. Much more, and I shall be giving away information of military importance, or disclosing too much of my own feelings.’

With the battle in full swing, aircraft lend almost a sense of gaiety to the scene. It is the daring and audacity of the pilots that charms, that gives fresh heart to the battle-grimed artillery infantrymen in the trenches. One-tenth of the astounding experiences that then occur could not find page space in this or any other volume. One special instance is of a youthful pilot who, wandering over the enemy country at an

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absurdly low altitude, sighted a hitherto un-noted enemy aerodrome. The prelude to hide his 'stunt' was the silencing of a battery of vicious machine-guns. Then he turned his attention to the sheds, leaving behind five masses of shattered wood and metal work. Still bent on adventure he gave chase to a motor-car, driving it round corners, and through narrow lanes, at break-neck speed, until the demoralised driver concluded by landing himself and his cargo into a ditch beside the road. Uncontrollable mirth prevented our man from putting the final touch to the affair.

When the R.F.C. begin to get busy, the enemy wax wondrously active, locating dug-outs and possible hiding-places. The carnage is terrifying to view. Ammunition dumps and columns leap heavenwards in sheets of flame. Panic stricken gunners flee for cover. Railway tracks and roads are torn up and caved with the force of the explosions. And the advancing infantry are confronted with low-swooping aeroplanes that thin their ranks with murderous rapidity. To this condescends an R.F.C. pilot's report that 'the enemy's infantry were much demoralised, and left the line of march.'

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While General Ardenne, military correspondent of the *Tageblatt*, with reference to the same matter, pays tribute to the bravery of the German labour and transport battalions at work far from the trenches, telling how these troops are incessantly subjected to bombardment by British aircraft. 'Often,' he writes, 'in nearing the western front, signs are encountered reading "Caution." This roadway is under fire. The enormously long trains of teams, lorries, and men engaged in all sorts of important tasks cannot escape the fire of enemy airmen even by taking cover under adjacent trees. Their duty is simply to stand fast without any sort of protection. Wagons smashed to pieces and lacerated human bodies and dead horses are often found to bar the way when columns suddenly brought to a standstill attempt to move forward again.'

Which, after all, amounts to the same thing in the end.





# **Bomb-Raids**



## CHAPTER V

### Bomb-Raids

**O**F all aerial enterprises, that of participating in a raid is most trying to the nerves. Your aerial combat is over and done with after an excitingly exhilarating twenty minutes. Taking photographs necessitates a too-thrilling passage to and fro over the mustered anti-aircraft forces of the firing lines. While the direction of artillery, always within an unpleasantly low altitude of bombardment, lasts an hour and an hour and a half at most. It is the return journey that is so appalling in the raiding proposition.

Of course, where there are long raids that carry one far into the enemy's country, there are so many brief flights that barely fringe the trenches. Some are purely local affairs, for purposes of destroying advance headquarters and gun emplacements. Others again are raids on railway junctions and military positions ranging from ten to fifty miles behind the lines. But there is always the return journey to be accomplished.

The craft employed are cumbrous of

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type. This disadvantage cannot be avoided. Aircraft capacity is limited. Raiding is a matter of a plentiful supply of bombs and spare petrol aboard. Thus are the aeroplane's climbing powers and speed affected. And thus they are more easy targets to anti-aircraft guns and marauding Hun craft.

Other dangers are manifested in adverse weather conditions. Should enemy gun and craft fail to bring down the raider, there are always thin patches of air to be encountered; treacherous clouds to be fringed; the possibility of a sudden storm.

Returning from a daring raid, far behind the Hun front-lines and over the roar and thunder of a mighty battle, a British pilot had the misfortune to run into a real thunder-storm. The rain deluged in huge water-spouts. The vivid lightning flashes rent the sky. All around the earth was darkened by the heavy storm clouds. The giant hand of the storm took the frail aeroplane in its grasp, and toyed and played with it, up and down every chord in the heavens. Round flew the craft with the momentum of a spinning top; then she nosed into a steep dive. And nearer to the earth developed an understandable hankering for a certain big

## Bomb-Raids

gun. At the conclusion of each sudden swoop she would come out a few feet above the gun emplacement. Climbing back into the sky, she would suddenly dive down again, once, top over heels, anyhow almost on top of this new found friend. Another time endeavouring to whisper into its ear. Then the storm passed away.

Engine trouble is by no means without the realms of possibility, and this, over enemy territory, means almost infallible capture for the pilot. Rather than allow this to happen, many of the pilots of the R.F.C. deliberately crash into the earth, shattering the craft beyond investigation, and breaking their own necks. Along the coast with R.N.A.S. pilots there is a similar gallant tradition, to plunge their machines into the sea.

Such a descent was witnessed recently by two French seaplanes. Floundering about on the surface of the sea was a badly shattered British seaplane, and, true to devout Hunnish traditions, the Boches were shelling it for all they were worth.

Lower she sank into the water. The Frenchmen sped to the rescue, alighting alongside. One took off the wounded observer,

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and, in spite of redoubled fire from the shore, returned in safety. The other had actually embarked the remaining occupant, but was hit as she rose from the water, and fell disabled. The other Frenchman, sighting the approach of a Boche machine, and a bevy of small craft inshore, and realising the position to be hopeless, made off as rapidly as possible. But, before doing so, found time to scribble a hasty note; concluding it, with true Gallic dauntlessness, with a 'Vive la France.' This he strung to the leg of a carrier pigeon, that reached his unfortunate companions the instant before their capture.

The air-raider is a bird of the darkness. Almost every dark still night can be heard, rising from behind various points of the British Front, frail, indistinct shapes, that slither off apologetically into the outer blackness; sometimes never to return. How much the army that never flies owes to these gallant pilots, how nerve-wracking are the adventures that befall them, they may never guess. The youthful adventurers never give voice to their daring feats. They will complain sincerely that, with the raiding and the necessary sleeping hours, they have no spare

## Bomb-Raids

time for trivial matters as conversation. But sometimes the pent-up emotions will find vent in the curt official reports.

Prosaic phrases in black and white will effectively shroud the most astounding adventures. In their log (unofficially termed 'Game-book') are contained such entries as 'Number 3 was troubled by a searchlight, and dived for it. Sliding down the beam, he smashed it up effectively.'—'Four machines sent up managed to bag five Huns before breakfast.' Another: 'I then went over the German trenches filled with soldiers, and was fired on by machine-guns, rifles, and small field guns, in or out of range!' This pilot landed at the first aerodrome he saw, adding, in apologetic explanation of so irregular a proceeding, that 'His machine was badly shot about.'

Flight Lieut. F—— departed one night to raid D——. Over the city, and in a blaze of searchlights and bursting shrapnel, he lost his engine, streaking nose first for the earth. Imagining him to be beyond recovery, the Boches ceased fire; when, at five hundred up, he got her straight and made off homeward. One danger he eluded for a greater. Three returning enemy craft were



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encountered. The fight waxed fast and furious. F—— dived, and banked, and turned; now this way, now that. After the fashion of a swarming apiary, other enemy craft engaged in the combat, clinging closely to his wash. His observer was wounded in the wrist, numbing his hand, and preventing him from using his machine-gun; but only for the time. Then, with a superhuman effort, F—— climbed above the flock of enemy craft, and, bringing down two in quick succession, made off into the night.

By now the whole country-side had been alarmed. Searchlights and flying shrapnel greeted him at every mile. An 'Archie' fragment shattered his ankle. Notwithstanding this, he carried on. His machine was riddled with bullets. Owing to the damage, navigation was most difficult. The return journey was exceedingly slow, and consequently he was attacked again. Again his gunlayer was wounded; but he drove the enemy off, made his base, and lived to raid another night.

Wonderful as this adventure may be—and one could relate scores of similar instances—a yet more wonderful experience has just befallen a British pilot, who, while

## Bomb-Raids

flying across the lines well below 4000 feet, was hit by an artillery shell.

Crashing through the body of the machine, the shell did not explode until it struck the engine. Then two cylinders and the engine-bearers flew apart, the splinters fracturing the pilot's leg in two places. Despite the agony he endured, he brought his machine down well within our own lines, and then lost consciousness.

So badly shattered was the craft that, when the pilot was extricated from the wreckage, they had to pull him out from the right-hand side through the hole made by the shell.

These bombs that fall in the night do not all bear the enemy's hall-mark—at least not in the region of the All-Highest.

When the Kaiser had his headquarters in Luxemburg, the town was subjected to a severe aerial bombardment about two o'clock in the morning. A little damage was done to the railway line, and orders were promptly issued that all pieces of the missiles which were picked up must be handed over to the military authorities. This was duly done, with the result that the bombs which had fallen in such close proximity to the All-

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Highest were discovered to have been of German origin! The raid had taken place in the dark; and the presumption was that a German aviator had lost his bearings and mistaken Luxemburg for Longwy.

This was not the only occasion upon which the Kaiser narrowly escaped death from the air. Quite recently, on Whit-Monday evening, to be exact, the All-Highest, Hindenburg, and their respective staffs were waiting a train in the St. Pieter's station at Ghent, when the place was suddenly attacked by Allied airmen. Bombs dropped on the station-yard and in the neighbouring streets. The soldier-guard without were wounded. But the Kaiser escaped!

A quaint little anecdote concerning an Australian pilot is not inappropriate to these columns. This young man, whenever he went up for a raid, always took with him a packet of a hundred Virginia cigarettes. 'For,' said he, 'it would be extremely annoying to be taken prisoner and have no decent tobacco to smoke.' But fickle jade Fortune intervened, and when he *was* brought down the hundred-box was found in his billet, where he had deposited it, already packed.

Only a trivial incident! But trivial

## Bomb-Raids

incidents go to make up the life of the air pilot on active service. Without these amusing interludes war would be a very sorry game. There must be something more in a man than grim determination to endow him with the joyful abandon of our youthful Air Services.

To take on three enemy machines, single-handed, and that far behind the Hun lines, was recently the fate of one of our pilots.

Nothing daunted, he surprised a methodical enemy into flight by assuming the offensive, when, by all the rules of the game, he should be fleeing hot foot for home. His first dive brought him to the level of the black cross on their tails. They waited for no more. In their hurry to get away, one side-slipped and crashed, and then there were two. One little aeroplane dived down nose first, right on an aerodrome, and then there was one. And one little aeroplane flew like the wind for home.

The same day five other enemy machines were brought down out of control. A raiding squadron of five Britishers encountered twenty-six Albatrosses, high up above the clouds, where occasional glimpses of the battle could be snatched through the mirage. The

## Glorious Exploits of the Air

entire enemy squadron was not encountered immediately. Two intercepting scouts started the affair off. Their cry for help brought up three groups more of enemy aeroplanes—eight and nine machines in each group—all approaching from different directions.

‘The altitude of the battle,’ a pilot stated afterwards, ‘was somewhere about 10,600 feet—roughly two miles.’ Almost at once an enemy craft was shot down, its wings flying apart in mid-air. Then two more dropped down out of control.

A British pilot followed suit with engine failure, being attacked by a swarm of enemy craft in his descent. Down plunged another of our craft to his assistance. A Hun went earthward in a mass of flame. The faulty engine ‘picked up,’ and the two returned to the main battle, which kept on until five other enemy craft sky-rocketed earthwards out of control. This was enough for the remainder, who promptly made off.

The most successful raid of the year was that recently achieved by French pilots on Trieste. In reality a reprisal for the enemy bombardment of Venice, this affair will go down in history as one of the most audacious expeditions of the war. Leaving

## Bomb-Raids

Venice shortly after midnight the squadron ran into a dense bank of fog. There followed a highly tortuous time, the machines losing sight of one another, and missing collision by wing-tips. Earth and sky were alike blotted out from view. The direction of the objective was hidden from view. In such a plight the average airman would have given it up as hopeless. But not so those gallant pilots. By a miracle of good airman-ship they kept true to their course, and came out of the fog some two or three miles from their objective.

Shortly after they reached the city flying at an altitude of 4000 feet. The sky was ablaze with light. Searchlights great and small crept up from all corners and flashed across the sky, blinding their eyes. The bursting shrapnel was thick as hail. But even this did not deter them. In well-ordered precision they swooped down with ever-widening circles to 2000 feet, and commenced their bombardment.

Immediately tiny pin-pricks of flame leapt up from all quarters of the city. The shelling from the ground grew more intense. Faster dropped the bombs. And, as they made off across the bay, they could see, in

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**the brilliant glare of the searchlights, smoke shrouds all over the city.**

**Not content with this, they then singled out the most aggressive of the searchlights and of the guns, and sliding down the beams, reduced them to battered heaps. Then they made for home without a single casualty.**

# **Air Raids! And Then?**





## CHAPTER VI

### Air Raids! And Then?

**E**ARTH dark! Grey mist! Red streaking the eastern horizon! A gleam of grey daylight! Clouds! Darkness! More grey daylight! Cloudy again! Red blazes heavenward, to the east! Conspicuous green of the landing ground! Ogresome shapes; grey hangars! A low hum of wind through the heavy-hanging branches! Cold! Bitter wind! Aeroplanes squatting around the ground in a rough semicircle. Dim, indistinct, hurrying figures!

One by one the leather-clad pilots conclude their final survey and climb up into their machines. A couple of hours later one of the machines circles overhead, and finally comes to earth. The pilot climbs stiffly out of his seat, pushing up his goggles, and puckers his eyes in the light of the lanterns as he fumbles for his cigarette case. 'Got 'em,' he says, laconically. 'Seaplane sheds on the mole. Time for another trip.'

One crowded hour of glorious life? Ask the pilot!

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Over the way the enemy trenches appear a long wriggling worm to the flying man hovering over them at eight, nine, eleven, fifteen thousand feet. Movement? Never visible to the naked eye. But then? Just then the photographers begin to get busy, maybe two days after, maybe a week; up and down the lines, up and down. Nothing can be hidden from the prying camera lens. And the Hun knows it. *Gott strafe* the R.F.C.

'An air photograph to an inexperienced eye,' wrote H. G. Wells, after a recent visit to the Front, 'is not a very illuminating thing; one makes out roads, blurs of wood, and rather vague buildings.' But the examiner has an eye that has been in training. He is a picked man; he has at hand yesterday's photographs and last week's photographs, marked maps, and all sorts of aids and records. . . . 'Here,' he will point out, 'is a little difference between the German trench beyond the wood since yesterday. For a number of reasons he thinks it will be a new machine-gun emplacement; here, at the corner of the farm wall, they have been making another. This battery here— isn't it plain? Well, it's a dummy. The grass

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in front of it hasn't scorched, and there's been no serious affair on the road here for a week.'

Truly he has 'an eye that has been in training.' He will tell you without hesitation that that queer blot—over to the right of the picture there, between the road and railway—is a new gun emplacement; that harmless microscopic scratch, a fresh enemy support! Dangerous? Extremely so! And useful.

Air photos are tricky things. They always represent what they are accredited not to be. Take photo number one; the official picture of an air raid on Zeebrugge. To the north of the lock are twelve distinct shell marks. Sheds, warehouses, depots, with perhaps ammunition, perhaps food-stuffs, suggest themselves in this proximity. Imagine the havoc occasioned by those twelve holes, and the military advantage accruing!

At F—— there is a badly damaged storehouse—an excellent shot that! Immediately alongside the lock gate A——, a most essential position, another. To the extreme left of the picture, two direct hits on main roads. There will be more than a considerable dislocation of traffic for a week or more.

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Along the wharves to the south of the canal, two more direct hits; certainly warehouses. The dotted rings indicate cavities formed by shells or bombs.

Photograph number two, a similar reconnaissance over Ostende. Positions marked are: A, shell-hole; B, shell damaging entrance gates to basin; C, destroyer damaged on her side; D, pier damaged; F, shell-holes; G, corner of shop demolished; H, skylight of shop blown out by explosion inside; J, roof of shop collapsed; L, groups of shops demolished; P, shop collapsed; Q, destroyer with side damaged; R, wreckage in berth inside destroyer, probably from smaller vessel moored there; S, building demolished; T, damage to end of wharf; U and Z, damage to a jetty; W, wreckage; Y, top of submarine shelter depressed; X, shell-hole in the mud; ZZ, camber displaced, though the floating dock with two submarines escaped damage except at XX and YY. The only damage shown is that which affects roofs and horizontal areas. Damage to the sides of buildings which must exist is not shown. (1) Oyster preserve; (2) Anti-aircraft battery; (3) Floating dock building.

This kind of aerial business is not without

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danger, and not without adventure. Number two must have proved rather a thorn in the side of our pilots. And there exists similar number twos along every mile of that Belgian coast. Cases have occurred where our machines have landed two and three times on their side of the lines. And, after a hair-rising fifteen and twenty minutes of repairs, have made off again. On the return journey, individual fights, general *mêlées*, and patrol encounters run up well into the century.

A photographer, at eleven thousand feet, none too well armed, sighted four hostile craft, five thousand feet below him. Without hesitation he dived at them. The observer of the leading machine he saw crumple up over the fusilage, as the pilot lost himself in a headlong dive. He flattened out, however, after a descent of a thousand feet. Immediately our man was on top of him; with a scorching fire he cut clean through the two port planes of the enemy machine at three thousand feet. It was the beginning of the end. At two thousand feet the starboard wings fell off; the skeleton burned like a funeral pyre upon the ground.

Vengeance bound, one of the remaining three bit at the Britisher's tail. He wheeled

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into battle. Immediately the enemy dived for home.

Another photographer had a most gratifying escape from certain death. Over the 'lines' a high explosive shell burst almost immediately beneath him. Not being strapped into his seat, the resulting explosion banked the machine so severely that he was thrown out on to the left wing. By a miracle the machine righted herself, slinging him across the body on to the other wing. Then, as if not content with her queer antics, the aeroplane finished up by jerking him back into his seat. In the meanwhile they had been dropping rapidly, and before he could right her she had crashed to the ground; luckily without injury to the pilot.

A number of people in the neighbourhood who had foreseen the accident immediately gathered round, including a padre who had been bathing in a neighbouring stream *à la nature*. In the excitement of watching the smash, he entirely forgot his condition. And for fully ten minutes he mingled with the crowd without noticing anything peculiar about his appearance. Realisation came with discretion if not with haste.

Some positions are altogether too distant

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for after-photographic survey. One such raid on Krupp's works at Essen is claimed by our Brother Service of the Grey Armies—and rightly so—as the most glorious aerial exploit of the war.

One of the participating pilots' version of the affair (varying into Anglo-French that is popularly readable), and the extracts mostly 'lifted' from his official log-book, was as follows: 'The distance to be covered was pretty near 500 miles. But it did not frighten me, for had I not had an extensive training in this sort of work for over seven years? 11 A.M. My friend set off two minutes ago. I follow him. 2000, 3000, 4000 feet; higher and higher we climb. Weather clear. Clouds over 9000 feet. Extremely cold—below lies the river, with a long string of barges bound for Coblenz. If only I had some bombs to spare? The temptation!

'Bonn is below. My friend is on my extreme right. Those first 200 kilometres have literally flown. Cold weather up here. My thermometer shows 16 degrees below zero; my speedometer 130 m.p.h., a goodish speed! I move arms and legs violently to restore circulation.



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‘Later—The Rhine! More boats, that great town below must be Cologne. Further temptation to bomb! Solingen, Elberfeld, Barmen. What a criss-cross of railway lines, and black sky chimneys it is!

‘Terrific bombardment of anti-aircraft shells. I hear pieces of steel whistle past, unpleasantly near. So I climb higher, and the danger passes. Where is my friend? He has disappeared from sight! Has he lost his way? Is he above the clouds? Horrible thought!—Has he been brought down?

‘Away, below me, through a break in the clouds, I sight another machine. That must be he! No! Black crosses on either wing. He sights me, and opens fire. I would like to go down and have a bout with him, but Essen is my objective. So he is left far in the background, until Treves lies below. But now, on my left, the silhouette of another machine draws nearer and nearer. Another enemy? I hang fire. Now in the clouds, now out; it is impossible to make out his national markings. Then I catch sight of his blue, white and red cocarde. My comrade? Luckily I didn’t fire; I feel less lonely now.

‘Course changed! Far in front there

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twists and turns a small grey ribbon . . . the Rhine.

‘Essen, at last, a great smudge of black and red in the green countryside. Shops, buildings, houses, factory chimneys, trains, railway-lines, roads innumerable, and guns. We are going to have “some” strafing! As I thought.

‘Now we are over the centre of the town. We drop our bombs and torpedoes in rapid succession. The anti-aircraft shelling grows frantic. Enemy aircraft fly up from all directions. The people rush out into the streets; the entire city has gone mad! Intense fires break out in all parts.

‘Now we make off in a homeward direction as fast as our engines will carry us! Dusseldorf again. Now the wind is ahead of me, materially reducing my speed. My oil and petrol tanks reveal another six hours. The clouds grow denser and denser. I have to rely on my compass for course . . . S.S.W.

‘Anti-aircraft shells again. And another nasty shock; three Boche planes giving chase, 1500 and 2000 feet below me. I swerve from my course, and dive at the leading machine. Apparently he has no wish to fight, for he sheers off hurriedly.

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‘Six hours of it; my fingers are numbed; my feet lifeless; and I have lost all sight of my companion. My eyes smart and burn, my whole body is stiff with cramp. Am I over France yet? I cannot stand much more, I must come down. I shut my engine off—sweet silence after that roaring tempest.

‘The guns and the sounds of fighting have all died away. Down and down I plunge, and land eventually in a wide meadow beside a little village. But where? I keep my engine running, prepared for emergencies. People come running towards me. “Where am I?” I inquire, surprised at the weak, hollow voice that greets my ear.

“At Champaubert,” they answer me, in French. Thank Heaven! Safe at last!’

Some of the other pilots who indulge in long distance raids do not share the same good fortune, as witness the following extract from a recent Turkish Official: ‘On the 22nd one of our airmen fought a successful duel with an enemy raiding machine, with the result that the enemy was killed and the machine destroyed. The enemy attacked first at 200 yards at an elevation of 7500 feet. Our airman drew close in, travelling at the same level, and made a quick cart-wheel

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turn over the machine's tail, compelling it to dive. The enemy aeroplane descended at a terrific pace and our man followed in pursuit less than 10 yards behind. After a few seconds fragments of the enemy machine flew apart, and the enemy pilot lost control. At 4000 feet his two wings broke off, and he fell to the ground two miles in front of the lines. The machine and body of the pilot are now in our possession.'

The raiding aeroplane usually carries a crew of two: the pilot, to fly the machine; the observer, to direct the course and the dropping of bombs.

Again, for certain kind of work the pilot invariably flies alone. In this case there is no alternative between safety and crash. Pilots have been known to make their base again. For the rest, they have broken their necks, or fallen prisoners, or a watchful Providence has guided them to safety, after many strange adventures. The case of M—— might be included in the latter class. Reconnaissance bound, one misty summer's morning he found himself, with engine trouble, landed inside the enemy's lines. Burning his craft, he discerned dark figures approaching through the haze. A neighbouring ditch,

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deep and dry, served excellent cover. The enemy searched for him, high and low, but without success. Two days and two nights in these confined quarters painfully cramped his legs, he was almost lame when he set out along the high road. A matter of two miles or more ahead he met a friendly Belgian. An insignificant monetary transaction habited him in civilian clothes. Thus attired he made the outskirts of L——. There a passing tram proved a sore temptation, and within he found half a score of Prussian officers. They stared at him rather curiously, but further than that deigned not to take notice of 'ein Schweinhund' of a Belgian peasant. Where to alight he had no idea. He thought desperately. 'A la grande place, s'il vous plaît,' he asked. Luck was with him again.

In the city he was hidden in an attic for three weeks. Then the suspicions of the police necessitated a flight in the early hours. And, trudging wearily across Belgium, living on offal and refuse, he reached the Dutch frontier. Here followed another agonising vigil in a ditch; this time of a day and a night. Late in the evening the sentry paused to light his pipe. M—— seized the oppor-

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tunity, and dashed across the intervening space. The sentry, startled by the sudden apparition, fired wildly and missed. He was safe at last!

Across Holland, and the booking of a passage to England was a matter of a few more days, where, arrived, he reported himself to the astonished officials.



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**AN AEROPLANE ATTACKING A MOTOR-CAR.**

Incidents of this kind frequently occur on the Western Front, much to the chagrin and dismay of the German head-quarters staff, who invariably employ this means of transport from one position to another.



## CHAPTER VII

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**F**ADING away in the grey mist of the twilight, dark specks on the sky-line, the air patrols fly off in the direction of the enemy lines; some reconnaissance bound, to spy out of his new positions, the movements of his troops; others to scour the clouds for fighting craft; the rest for photography, bombing-raids, or to 'sit' across the lines, directing artillery fire. It is the last glimpse as they disappear across the horizon. An hour or so later they will come winging home, one—two—four—six. But eight they were in number when they set out! Where are the other two? Somewhere back there, thousands of feet below, a heap of shattered fabric. Word comes through by 'phone from an advanced position, 'One of our machines crashed down at Y——, another seen to disappear over the enemy country out of control.' There is no doubt of the identity. Perhaps a few days hence will drop from the clouds a courteous note from

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the Hun airmen, 'Lieutenant X—a prisoner, and unhurt'—a small packet of personal trinkets reverently tied together, a token to the gallant deed. And in the Official of the following day, a brief after-note: 'Two of our machines failed to return.'

Those few words speak volumes to imaginative minds; so brief, so curt, yet shrouding an adventure, the daring of which makes one's heart leap; the pathos brings tears to one's eyes. Some are brought crashing to earth immediately; others lucky enough to make their own base.

Above the aerodrome there hums the approach of a returning aeroplane. With a preliminary sweep it lands, unsteadily, and with an unnerving jar, then silence. Chaffing voices are heard calling. 'Exhibition flight?'

'Teaching us how to land?'

'Why didn't you break the other wing while you were about it?'

'Try nose-diving, next time, old man!'

Suddenly the ragging ceases. Anxious figures gather round the machine, and gently lift the pilot to the ground; a huddled heap, with blood-drained countenance, and on the tunic an ugly brown stain. He was hit

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ten miles distant, and by sheer will-power kept on.

More fortunate was the 'Hun'—beginner—who lost control of his craft some few thousand feet up, nose-dived, and pulled her out in time. As he was planing in, his engine failed, but by—unconsciously—superb airmanship he cleared the sheds. Then, as he was about to land, a sudden gust of wind caught the tail of his aeroplane, and, lifting her, crashed her twenty feet to the ground. They hauled his body out of the shattered debris to find that he had fractured two ribs and broken his neck! Four months later, to the astonishment of everyone concerned, he was flying better than ever.

To find oneself plunging into space, at the speed of some hundred miles an hour, with the machine injured beyond recovery, and no available landing-place in sight, is not the pleasantest of sensations. Thus a pilot found himself on the Western Front. Two struts of the left wing had been carried away, and the engine hopelessly incapacitated. The surface below was covered with steep valleys, and seemingly never ending forests of trees—hardly the landscape to delight the heart of an airman. The position

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appeared hopeless. It mattered little where the smash would be, and with sardonic humour, he chose a narrow strip of land—an apology for a field.

Thirty seconds later, breathless and grasping, he found himself wedged between four stout hedges, into which the craft fitted like a band-box, without a bone broken and with an unimpaired flow of imprecation.

Of the craft that are reported missing, the incident is invariably witnessed by the men in both front-line trenches; the thrilling fight in the air, the swift descent, the craft disappearing behind a rise in the land. In one instance an R.F.C. craft broke partially out of control, and the pilot found himself diving for the enemy lines. Unable to recover themselves, they saved their ammunition for a last burst as they neared the ground. As they passed overhead our infantry caught a glimpse of the observer, bending over his gun, firing desperately. Then they disappeared behind a hillock, whence an instant later there came a crash and a great burst of flame.

Prior to the Big Push a similar incident occurred near Y——. One of our machines disappeared over the lines, and was given

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up for lost. Pilot and observer were reported missing, believed killed. Meanwhile they landed in a field behind the German trenches. The pilot set fire to his craft, and they waited to be taken prisoners. Not a soul appeared! They remained a short while longer beside the flaring machine, then, being still ignored, determined to hide themselves. Plunging into a wood, they discovered a disused dug-out, and hid themselves therein. Two days later they heard footsteps approaching. They waited, drawing their revolvers, determined to make a fight for it. The voices that came to their ears had an unmistakable Cockney accent; could it be our men, or was it a trick of the enemy's to get them out? Presently a figure darkened itself against the entrance.

'Ow many of you are down there?' demanded a gruff voice. And they discovered to their happy astonishment that it was a party of our advancing infantry.

Had the Boches not been so concerned with their own retiral at this period, this rescue could never have been effected.

The observer, it will be seen from the foregoing narratives, is dependent on the pilot, not alone for position in the aerial combat,



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manœuvring of the craft, but for life and safety. He is the passenger, but he is the brain of the craft; he directs the course, indicates the desired altitude, mans the gun, manipulates the wireless key, obtains the photographs. His eye supplies the information the Headquarters staff are so anxious to glean; his skill with the wireless key and map, that brings those dreaded shells nearer and surer to the Boche positions. But should the pilot be hit, he is helpless. He must sit cooped in his narrow seat calmly waiting death.

Occasions have been when the observer has carried on for the pilot, but they are few. One exception occurred near St. J—— in the late summer of 1916. After a bout with bursting 'Archies' the pilot had been mortally wounded. The observer felt the machine give a sudden dive, and looked round to see the pilot huddled over his control-stick. Lower sank the prow of the machine. It was almost a nose-dive. There was a chance, if he could reach the control-stick. Awkwardly he clambered across. A sudden movement tilted the machine. He paused, breathless, then, with a last effort, squirmed across to the pilot's side. Half the battle!

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But would there yet be time? The earth was perilously near. He ruddered right, and attempted, gently, to flatten out. No result! The pace was terrifying, the force of the head-wind choked and stung.

At last she gave signs of righting herself. Below, the aerodrome came into view. With a final glide he landed. They were safe! He gave a great sob of relief.

This is only one of a thousand adventures that befall the pilot in the air. Each flight provides a series of thrilling incidents. Each cloud hides a possible adventure. Each near-by shell-burst is a narrow escape from certain death. And more extraordinary than any are the happenings in aerial combats. No two flights are alike; there exists no precedent, no tradition, for what would be the use in a case like the following?

Above a bank of racing snow-white clouds a British craft met a Halberstadt. The ensuing fight was fast and furious. Now our man was above, now the enemy. They wheeled and banked, dived and turned. At last the Boche was at his mercy. He plugged two trays of ammunition into his back. Still the enemy kept on. By all the rules of aerial battle he should, long since, have been

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diving, helpless, to the earth. Instead, he flew round in ever-lengthening circles. Our man got him again. His own eyes were witness to the fact that he had hit him at least on three occasions. Becoming curious, he closed in. The Boche lay back in his seat, the blood oozing from a wound in his neck, stone dead! The machine had automatically flown herself by a series of stout rubber bands. For another three minutes she kept on thus, then her tail jerked up, and she disappeared.

Another pilot was aware of a machine that continuously kept ahead of him, with an unvarying speed and altitude. As he banked right, the other craft followed suit. He banked left; there she was, in the same position. He began to get annoyed, and determined to put an end to it. And it was not until his hand was already on his gun that he discovered that the supposed machine was his own mirage in the clouds.

The most curious of all adventures fell to the enemy bag; one of our painfully-toiling tanks, the *raison d'être*. He must have been a very young pilot who took it into his head that here was an easy prey. With a daring sweep he came down on top of her. The incident developed after the

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fashion of an angry terrier with a wise old rat. The tank appeared totally oblivious of his presence. This annoyed him still more. He bombed furiously, keeping up the effort until all his supplies were exhausted, and he was taken unawares by one of our patrolling craft. But the tank still kept on its way!

Somewhat of a side-line, but nevertheless useful, was the manner in which a flying man helped to capture an enemy spy; and this from three thousand feet in the air! There had, in a sector of our front, for time past, been a mysteriously accurate shelling of our heavy guns. No sooner were they in position than over would fly the enemy aircraft. Alarmed off-springs of the Intelligence hurried round, questioning here, examining there. Their quest was fruitless. It was a serious situation! Before that sector lay the venue of an impending infantry attack. If the guns were silenced the movement would be impossible. At the eleventh hour the difficulty was solved by the watchfulness of an aerial observer. He reported, in a field two miles to the east he had, on occasions, noticed the peculiar directness of the ploughed furrows. Watch was kept of the

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peasants farming in that area, until it was discovered that a certain farmer laid his furrows always pointing in the direction of our gun positions, and that these formed excellent points for the enemy aeroplanes. Watch was kept, and capture revealed no peasant, but an officer of the Prussian Guards left in the retreat.

The scene changes to the east; a small group of hangars; before them a battleplane of latest type, and gathered round it half a score of perspiring mechanics. Set these figures in the background of a long valley that shelves, gently undulating, to the Mediterranean, and you have the picture I have in mind. The craft is soon disappearing into the velvet dusk of the horizon, her crew of one, with a plentiful supply of bombs, bound upon some secret mission. Only the pilot knew that word had come through that evening from an advanced post, a Turkish gun-boat had been sighted towing two large transports up the river. The pilot held on at a good altitude. The evening grew darker; then the moon began to rise. At last he sighted the river, a winding ribbon of grey, thousands of feet beneath. He scoured the surface for the enemy, and came up with him

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at a mud-flanked bend. A bomb in close locality brought the guns flashing at the bows and prow of the gun-boat; but first blood went to the air pilot. The enemy, in his attempt to avoid the bombs, found himself high and dry on a mud-bank! The pilot missed with his three remaining bombs, and flew off fifty miles to his base for a fresh supply. When he returned the enemy had extricated himself, and was steaming up stream at full speed. Again the pilot bombed. Again he drove the enemy into the bank. And again his ammunition ran out. A second return from his base found the position of the gun-boat unchanged. More, her guns were partially disabled.

Coming down to a lower altitude, he hit her in the bows, and had the pleasure of seeing her sink beneath the muddied surface. This feat had occupied from nine in the evening until six in the morning to accomplish.

Further east, the arid wastes of the Sinai Desert; the hour before sunrise. Before the world is astir the flying men are up. With a whirl of sand an aeroplane rises behind the British line. Slowly she climbs, in sweeping circles, to three thousand feet. It is a

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wonderful panorama that stretches away northwards, to the blue waters of the sea; westwards, to white domed mosques and minarets of Cairo; east, to the horizon, to the fringes of the desert across which the sun is rising heavenwards, ringed around with yellow and flame. Lines of trenches are below: one side swarming with khaki-clad figures, their bayonets occasionally sharp-glinted in the sun rays; an ordered battalion of bell-tents in the rear, the beasts of the camel corps squatting on the sand, motor lorries, supply depots, and transport wagons; the other side rather less ordered, a strange intermingling of multi-hued fez and turban. The air is eerily silent, then comes audible the not unmusical hum of the British aircraft. In the Turk trench figures stir hurriedly. An antediluvian anti-aircraft gun opens fire. The sharp reports bring tousle-headed Tommies peering curiously over their line of sand-bags. The aeroplane, meanwhile, is making for a distant sector of the enemy line. The firing is accentuated.

The pilot pries overhead for the reason, and finds it behind a low range of hills, where a large surprise party of the enemy is moving stealthily forward. Here is a pretty dilemma

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for the British pilot. What shall he do; wireless the news back to his own base, or attempt a single-handed attack? The flying column is without A-A guns; he decides upon the latter course. He flies lower. Across the sand-hills, oblivious of danger, the British camp sleeps on. The enemy are aware of the manœuvring overhead, but withhold their fire. They have no wish to be discovered. Down comes the aeroplane to below a thousand feet. A bomb drops. The carnage commences with a flash and a roar. The enemy, demoralised, wildly open fire. Another bomb, and another. They hesitate. The pilot sweeps lower, opening fire with his machine-gun. They break; the cavalry wheel, and gallop off in a thunder of rising sand, our man in hot pursuit. The infantry throw down their arms and grovel in the sand.

To escape from a beleaguered city has always been a daring feat, that is under old-fashioned conditions. But, given a reliable aeroplane, and a safe landing ground, the affair is minimised to simplicity. A captain in the N——s, wandering round the outskirts of Kut, found an R.N.A.S. pilot landed in the marshes, with engine trouble. He en-



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quired if he wanted an observer, and, receiving a reply in the affirmative, he got aboard. Two days later the Turks entered the city.

The pilot of a battleplane, out somewhere in the North of France, and hiding behind the clouds for possible prey, sighted what he believed to be a party of our machines returning from a bombing-raid. They were ten in number, and flying at a low altitude. He made up to escort them. When only a few hundred yards distant he discovered they were enemy machines. Immediately they opened fire. He had still time to withdraw had he so wished. But that was far from being his intention. He closed with them, making nose-on for the leading craft. After a few rounds from his machine-gun he sent her crashing to the ground.

Two others followed suit. The rest made off, and the unusual spectacle was witnessed, of one solitary British craft full out after seven enemy machines. He added another to his bag. Then he was wounded in the shoulder and wrist. For a moment he lost consciousness, then, coming to, resumed the chase, only giving up when his ammunition was spent and his petrol run out.

It is deeds like this that give our Air

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Services so decided a mastery over the enemy. He may go on with building new and wonderful machines, but he cannot endow his men with the dauntless spirit and the disregard for danger that our gallant pilots invariably display.

What can they hope against such deeds as this? R—— was sent up to discover the position of a new group of enemy guns that were making havoc of our front line trenches. He was ordered to get the information at any price, and alone, to allow him more spare petrol for a long flight. Misfortune awaited from the start. He had not crossed the lines by five miles when he was hit by a shrapnel bullet. He bound his wound hastily with his handkerchief, and kept on, determined to reach his objective. He sighted the group, and was making closer inspection when he was hit again. He fainted. The machine dived steeply; down and down, faster and faster. The enemy ceased fire, imagining his position to be hopeless. In time he came to.

Before they had recovered from their astonishment, he was disappearing over the sky-line. The agony of that homeward flight cannot be described with ink and paper; it

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was a story that needs be written in blood. Mortally wounded, faint from loss of blood, and blinded with pain he made his way through a tornado of shrapnel and H.E. at low altitude, and landed within our lines. There they found him, but he never came to again. And before him on the report sheet was the desired information, filled into the minutest detail. The V.C. was handed to the pale-faced widow. But the brave spirit had fled to the Valhalla of the airmen, above the racing clouds.

# **Fighting the Zeppelins**



## CHAPTER VIII

### Fighting the Zeppelins

**F**ROM a close study of excited human-kind on raid nights, one gathers that the average emotions experienced by the average layman are as widely divergent and opposite as possible the human mind can harbour. Predominant there is a burning sense of wrath against these callous warriors of the air, heedless of heaping down death and destruction on helpless women and children. This is tinged with more than a glow of interest and hysterical excitement, in which is to be found a diverting influence from the months of groping in darkened streets, restricted amusements, and war-heavy atmosphere.

Somewhat of an exaggerated instance is the case of two Yankees meeting in the Savoy Hotel. Said the second of the Yankees: 'Why have I come across? To see the Zepps, of course.'

To a minor degree this is the attitude adopted by the average Londoner. He is always out to see the Zepps, despite any

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police regulation that was ever formulated. With the first crash, he is out into the streets, bareheaded — sometimes coatless, sometimes merely in his night-attire—craning his neck skywards, scrambling on the roofs and similar points of vantage, with never a thought of fear. London regards Zeppelin raids as thundering good sport.

Perhaps this interest, together with the knowledge that the giant airship forms now an extremely vulnerable target to our anti-aircraft guns, blinds him to the fact that the Zeppelin is in its most valuable sphere as a sea-scout, and not as a raider.

Thus, on the one hand we have the sudden blaze of searchlights across the face of the blackened sky; mysterious flashes above and below; the roar of the guns; the eerie fascination of the night. There are signals from the patrolling aeroplanes to the guns, and to the pilots from the aerodromes. Into the far glare of the searchlight creeps the long, grey form of the raider. The firing is renewed with a maddened roar. Above and below the craft flutter past, like flies—the attacking aeroplanes. Then, as suddenly as the din arose, it dies away. The ensuing silence is compelling. It is tense with some

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unknown expectancy, some unknown desire. What has happened?

Suddenly the sky is lit up for miles around with a vivid yellow flare. The flame licks along the framework and the gondola of the Zeppelin, now painfully visible from the ground. The vast watching multitudes break into hoarse shouts and frenzied cheers, and echo and re-echo back into the vast solitudes of the night. Now the Zeppelin noses rapidly to earth in a V-shaped column of flame. Then another lightened glare, and all is over.

Since 1797, when a French force of 1400 men under General Tate landed in Pembroke-shire, the Zeppelin crew was the first enemy invader to set foot on our shores. That, perhaps, is why they met with so stubborn a reception. From Robinson, who flew alongside his victim, exposed to machine-gun bullets, until he managed to explode a petrol tank of his enemy, to Cadbury and Pulling, who chased a raiding Zepp far out across the North Sea, and, after a desperate running fight, brought it down into the water, our youthful air defenders have made glorious history.

The latter affair occurred November 28 last year. After raiding the Midlands, the Zeppelin was attacked repeatedly on the



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return journey by R.F.C. aeroplanes. Crippled, she yet managed to effect her repairs, and made off seawards. Hot foot after her went the pilots of the R.N.A.S., attacking like a swarm of mosquitoes; diving in, firing a round, then making off again. For she was a Goliath in armament to the David-like catapult of their tiny machine-guns. But after a stern two hours, she heeled over mournfully and made an ungraceful exit.

The 'Navy that flies' has on record that 'they fight when they must, and the straightest shot wins.' If hit, unless hopelessly out of control, they take to the water like a wounded duck. If the damage is beyond temporary repair, they sit on the surface and pray for the dawn and a tow from a friendly destroyer.

'No aerial adventure is ever recounted (and the array of D.S.O. ribbons round their mess-table is witness of the quality of these blindfold flights) without its humorous aspect well-nigh obliterating all else. One who fought a Zeppelin single-handed with a Webley-Scott pistol and imprecations found himself immortalised only in the pages of a monthly magazine of Puck-like humour they publish—Fate and funds permitting.'

Another R.N.A.S. pilot up after Zepps

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was alarmed by a sudden smell of burning, and found the front of his fusilage in flames. He made for earth as fast as he knew how, crashing into a large meadow. The shock of the contact threw him violently from the pilot's seat on to the ground, and he lost consciousness.

The mishap—or rather the glare in the sky—had been witnessed from his own aerodrome, two miles distant. Motor-cars and ambulances were immediately sent out to find him. But he lay far from the road, and eventually another aeroplane had to come down near by, and, piling the unconscious body into the observer's seat, he was thus conveyed to the hospital.

On the other hand we have the Zeppelin scouting above the grey wastes of the North Sea. Sometimes it will be shepherding a naval fleet—in this form of employment it is invaluable. At others it will be fighting duels with Allied submarines, and holding up merchant ships.

The Norwegian barque *Royal* was captured in this manner off Hanstholm. In the course of his Report, the captain of the *Royal* states:

‘For some time it circled over the vessel while officers examined it through their

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glasses. Suddenly the Zeppelin came down to within a short distance of the schooner and ordered it to stop. The sailors left in the lifeboats and the Zeppelin landed on the surface. Three Germans were sent on board, and the ship was taken to Cuxhaven.'

The defence against Zeppelins is similar to that employed against submarines; shrouded in secrecy. It would not be wise to state too definitely just why it is that now for every raid the enemy must pay the price with one or more costly and magnificent craft. But a comparison with the early days reveals the fact that not only the aeroplanes, but also the guns and the shooting, have been greatly improved.

The trajectories for gunnery against swiftly moving objects, thousands of feet up in the air, and with a downward and upward, as well as a forward movement, are extremely difficult to work out. This in part accounts for previous inaccurate marksmanship. But experience has brought accuracy, as Zeppelin commanders have learnt to their cost.

Why, then, if these raids are signally useless, and invariably attended with disaster, do the enemy persist in these midnight visits? Professor Sefton Delmer (late of Berlin

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University) enlightened us considerably upon this matter in a recent number of the *Weekly Dispatch*. He writes:

‘Anyone who remembers Berlin just before the war will recollect that the air above the town, especially on the outskirts, used to be full of all sorts of machines. They were like mosquitoes over a summer pool. What was the meaning of all this aircraft activity? It was looked upon by the people in Germany, as it was by that part of the English public who attached any importance to doings in Berlin, as a form of sport, as an interesting struggle between the mind of man and the forces of nature. But most people in England forgot that sport for the German is merely a branch of military preparation.

‘At the Staff College in Berlin, where about five hundred officers were being trained, it was noticeable for quite six months before the war that there was an immense and sudden development of the scientific military study of aviation. Several of the lecturers, of whom I was one, whispered their forebodings, and I mentioned the matter to some of our Press people. From the very first the German military authorities conceived of the air machine not only in its legitimate spheres

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of warfare, but also as an instrument for terrorising the civil population of the enemy, but they did not say so. They pretended that the French had begun by bombing Nuremberg, and they did this in order to prepare the German people for their own indiscriminate and criminal use of bombs.

‘It soon became one of their most delightful pastimes to picture London lying at the mercy of their Zeppelins. The Bank of England was to vanish in smoke, and the Houses of Parliament with the nefarious “Sir Grey” were to be levelled to the ground. At Wertheims’, the Berlin Whiteley’s, as a special treat for the children, a very elaborate piece of mechanism was shown representing a part of London with airships hanging over it. John Bull was seen through a window, comfortably reading his newspaper. On the alarm of Zeppelins he rushed to the skylight, pushed his head and shoulders through, and scanned the sky with a telescope. On catching sight of a Zeppelin he quickly bobbed down in great fear, and the skylight slammed behind him.

‘I knew an old official who made an English “poem” with the refrain:

‘**Germania, Germania, Germania rules the sky,  
Germania, Germania, with thee no one can vie.**’

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‘The Berlin population rejoiced with one accord whenever they heard of a Zeppelin raid.

‘When the news of a Zeppelin raid reaches Berlin the Press will have as the most attractive headline, right across the page, “Zeppelins over London.” German readers are horrified and indignant when they read the reports of the destruction of one of these machines—horrified and indignant at the heartlessness of the British people, who can cheer when they see a Zeppelin falling in flames. “Just think of the frightful sufferings of the brave men on board!” they say.’

An interesting description of one of these raids is found in ‘Im Marineluftschiff gegen England’—‘In a Naval Airship against England.’ It commences with the receipt of a telegraphic order from Berlin. ‘Weather favourable, attack London to-night,’ and goes on: ‘Punctual to the minute LIII leaves its hiding-place; the motors begin to hum, the ship rises majestically, and we are off—against England!’

‘The day was ending when the steersman reported: “Twenty sea miles from the coast,” and soon afterwards the N.C.O. shouts: “Land in sight.” We recognise

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Yarmouth, and then the ships separated to avoid collisions in the darkness.

‘Evidently we had been heard, for a searchlight began to sweep the sky. The second officer said the light must be near Winterton, and a couple of minutes later, the wireless operator brought the information that the English had sparked “Zeppelins passed over the Wash.”

‘At 12.15 we were over the Thames to the west of London. Then, “Full speed ahead!” Suddenly a number of searchlights began to work ahead of us. Their beams were directed to L31, under Lieut. Captain Mathy, who was on his fifth voyage over London. Shrapnel and shells burst all around the ship, but it came safely through, and we saw her bombs dropping on the city, and fires breaking out at various points.

‘Meanwhile LIII had reached the suburbs. “Klar zum Werfen,” and then “Abwerfen!” (“Clear for dropping” and “Throw down”) are the commands, but in the same moment a searchlight catches us. The first bomb falls and others follow at short intervals. In spite of the hum of the propellers and the noise of the motors, we can hear the bombs exploding and the shrapnel in our neighbourhood.

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“They won’t get us down so easily,” remarks the officer of the watch, “and the best of the fun is pouring down blessings on their heads!”

‘Two other Zeppelins were at the game over North London. Suddenly the whole sky was lighted up. A fiery ball was visible high in the air, but only for a second. Then it began to sink, to fall—at first slowly and then faster and faster. The clouds over the mouth of the Thames reflected the light. No doubt it is a ship on fire, we thought, a Zeppelin plunging to earth in flames.

‘But there was no time for thought, for just then the batteries at Sheerness opened fire on us. LIII manœuvred rapidly, and in a few minutes was safe. At 1.15 we crossed the coast-line, and at 2.30 this message was sparked: “Place North Hinder Lightship. London attacked.” Nothing more, as all details are reported in writing after arrival.’





# Across the Alps



## CHAPTER IX

### Across the Alps

**T**RUTH is stranger than fiction, but flying is stranger than either,' a pilot wrote recently from—well, somewhere in the North of France. Flying is more than strange. The years of practical aviation may be counted on the fingers of both hands. The personnel that man the craft are largely stripling youths in the early twenties.

A tiny black form—wasp-like—that hangs up high against the blue sky. A line of rugged, broken, snow-tipped Alps. A distant view of the winding, blue waters of the Po. Set these items in a background that moves from the rude, noisy fields of the Somme and Verdun, to the Watteau-like landscape of wheat-fields and vineyards of slumbering Lombardy. And over all there crawls the big, slashing, triple-engined Caproni. The pilot, a youngster of our own Flying Corps, is making a flight from Milan to Nice over the danger-strewn Alps. Now they are below. Squat, ugly beasts, that crouch like toads, with long vein-like, grey chasms; the valleys

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between. He is forced to rise another two thousand feet to avoid collision with a projecting crag of the towering Mount Cenis. The air is ice-like and whips through his leather coat. Strange currents rush up the gorges, and set his machine rocking and plunging. But at last the danger is past. The panorama below again becomes gentle and undulating. Now one of his engines has failed, but, keeping on as best he is able—wing-heavy to port—he makes a landing in a meadow behind Nice.

Record breaking went out of fashion that fourth day of August 1914. This is the reason that incidents like the one immediately before recounted have never found light. The 'stunt' air pilot, the darling of the public heart, shed his halo that August day, and crept silently across Channel to join the gay, small band in France to be ever after referred to in the *Official Communiqué* as 'one of our airmen.' And his daring swoops and nerve-shattering dives at Hendon, and similar places, appear to be mere child's play to the work he is accomplishing to-day. The reason? A comparison of craft will suffice.

Dreamlike almost are the altitudes at which flying operations take place nowadays.

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The fighting area ranges from that thin air above sixteen thousand feet to fifty feet above the enemy trenches; a cloud and sky fringed battlefield where all manner of craft are sweeping and diving through canyons, and tunnels, and grottos of grey cloud banks. And the craft resemble the early war model as much as the *Lusitania* resembled Noah's ark.

Remarked a war pilot recently upon this matter, 'It took my 1914 model an hour and a quarter to climb to six thousand feet.'

'That's nothing,' replied another. 'The old 'bus I had in those days would not reach six thousand feet at all.'

The one awe-inspiring feat of looping-the-loop holds a very low category in the present-day list of official stunts. The merest 'hun' or 'quirk' is almost at home with this simple stunt—nose down, faster and faster; back with the control-stick towards the region of the tummy; the blood rushing to one's head; a strangely jumbled panorama of cloud and sky. Another slight nose-dive and she is level again.

Looping has proved an invaluable accessory to aerial combat. What self-respecting, normal foe can stomach that apparition, crawling fly-wise above his skull-cap? And all day—the hours of darkness unexcepted—

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similar fights, similar feats, similar stunts are taking place somewhere along the lines, with unrelenting doggedness and intensity.

Looping and 'zumming'—putting the nose of the machine first slightly down, then shooting her heavenward like a rocket—a few weeks since a British scout skimmed hedges and tree-tops in the region of 'No Man's Land,' like a giant grass-hopper. Across the way, almost as far as a man may complain to a neighbour concerning his chickens, lay his objective—a Hun kite-balloon, bagged down comfortably and securely in a wooded hollow. With a last hop he was over the trees. Twice he snapped at her with his bombs; then she went off, and up, with the noise of a gross of burst toy balloons.

At the other extreme, somewhere in the region of nineteen thousand feet, another British scout, at the identical moment, dived at a hostile scout below him. With a spasmodic movement she heeled over sideways, then commenced to spin rapidly. Half-way to earth she met a group of three other machines, speeding to her rescue. Unable to avoid the swift descent, another scouting craft accompanied her.

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But this is a sorry weakling story compared to an incident that took place over the glistening snow-fields of the early spring. Just such a clear, keen morning it was. Cloudless blue skies that reflected the whitened earth to clearest possible visibility. Albatross machines scouting warily round the Bois de Biez. Suddenly, a similar group of British machines. Fast and furious waxed the fight. The trenches blazed with interest. Excitement ran high, the battle forgotten. Small stakes were proffered and accepted. Ten minutes sufficed to bring the Albatross tails into a fleeing line, with the British machines hard at their heels like yapping terriers. First one and then another were sent crashing down from a dizzy height. And of the remainder, the rear machine was seen to lag alarmingly, and, finally, to disappear beyond the snow-line.

Summer and winter, spring and autumn; each incident is closely akin, yet peculiarly dissimilar, whether it be over the muddled fields of Flanders, or velvet nights of the Orient. There, a three hundred mile flight was accomplished from Ukena to Mahenje over waste and swamp, desert and jungle, over climatic dangers innumerable, and hostile



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camps, the performance gaining for the pilot—a Flight Commander in the R.N.A.S.—a well-merited D.S.C.

Back to, some time, chilly Europe, above the village of Harnes we fly. Eight German Halberstadt machines are awaiting the approach of an inferior British force. Above the clouds they play for a pleasant ambush. But they have only anticipated disaster. The surprise of our machines is only momentary. Two Halberstadts pay the price of this unwarranted piece of impertinence.

One of those ‘knights of the air’—a British observer—is mortally wounded in the attempt. Doggedly he carries on until he has laid his enemy out. Then, and only then, does he find time to skim to earth and have his wounds dressed.

Only a typical instance, and not alone pertaining to our party. Herr enemy airman, whatever his brother of the trenches may be, is always a gentleman—and a sportsman. One such was brought down in our lines unwounded, after a desperate fight. Seeking his vanquisher, he extended a cordial hand, acknowledging modestly that ‘It had been a good fight.’

Muffled about in strange looking fur and

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leather coats, and stranger visored bonnets, with bare space for sight and breath, it is hard to differentiate between friend and foe. Even the Turk cannot excel us in this novel ceremonial. Even he may be—and has been allowed to pass muster as ‘one of ours.’ This happened recently with an aeroplane, three men, and full complement of explosives that landed near Bi-el-Abd. Severely ignored were they under the impression that it was a British craft down to effect repairs, until it was discovered to be an attempt to cut our railway and pipe line. The men alighted and were about to place the dynamite in position, when our patrol opened a heavy fire. Then the enemy airmen ran for their machine, leaving all the explosives and implements. Blood trails showed that one man had been hit, but, fortunately, not the slightest damage had been done.

More peaceful was the affair of the Belgian air pilot, who has just made a successful flight over the College of St. Michel at Brussels, where he was a former pupil. Flying the Belgian colours he descended to within 200 yards of the college, and was warmly cheered by his former class-mates—at least, so we were informed in the public press.

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On the same line, but further to the south, the feat of Lieutenant B——, a kite-balloon officer, was mentioned in French Army Orders. His balloon was hit by a shell, and drifted off towards the enemy line. Realising his desperate position, he immediately ripped open the balloon, and, at an altitude of three thousand feet, threw himself overboard in a parachute, thus preventing a craft of the very latest type from falling into the enemy's hands.

Another brilliant exploit of a youthful British pilot is culled from the same source. Wrote the special correspondent of the *Matin*:

‘The day before yesterday a British captain set out at daybreak, and made direct for the enemy's lines. Two Albatrosses made for him, but one of them, recognising him, quickly retired, and the second turned as though to follow suit, but was caught and fell in flames.

‘The British airman continued his flight, and when over Cambrai was met by five enemy aeroplanes. He ascended to 13,000 feet, but the five enemy machines also rose, and succeeded in getting between him and his own lines. The Englishman was not to be so easily caught. He made straight for

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the nearest enemy machine, brought it down with his machine-gun fire, and then dashed through the midst of the rest of the enemy and returned safely to the British lines none the worse for the adventure, except that his aeroplane had its left wing riddled with shot.'

Similar dangers and adventures arise not alone through the evil machinations and 'devilish tricks' of the enemy, but are the outcome, more often than not, of stormy weather conditions. Several of these incidents have already been recounted, but none more thrilling than the case of the pilot who, diving through the clouds at 5000 feet, discovered, to his surprise, another similar layer beneath him. Lower and lower he came, without any sign of the ground. Still the clouds continued, when, suddenly, a row of dark objects appeared before him, and he scraped a large belt of trees by inches. Considerably shaken, he turned and climbed rapidly, steering due west by his compass. At last the mist broke, and he caught glimpses of the country beneath. Then, finally, selecting a large meadow, he landed twenty-five miles from his aerodrome, relieved to find that it was well within our lines.

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Even the latter is no record. But the following narrative certainly tends in that direction:

During an air fight with a Hun machine, a British pilot was surprised to find no answering salvo from the rear of the machine. It was an extraordinarily simple matter to force the enemy to the ground. And there, when our people gathered round to capture the crew, they found the observer curled up under his gun. Imagining him to be already a corpse, they were discussing the best means of removing him, when they were surprised by a series of violent snores proceeding from the direction of the—supposed—dead man.

They found him to be hopelessly intoxicated, and, on learning that he was a prisoner, he cursed his pilot volubly for not making for the German lines again. Even the fact that he had broken all records for air fighting did not tend to soothe his ruffled vanity.

# **Submarine Patrols**



## CHAPTER X

### Submarine Patrols

**I**T was late twilight when, with a last feeble roar, and far out into the North Sea, a lonely seaplane descended, helpless, to the water's edge. The region was as bare as the Arctic Seas. As far as the eye could turn swept molten grey seas and skies, with never a ship of any sort in sight. Out of the body of the craft scrambled two dark figures on to the floats, and along to the engine, in a helpless attempt to set things right. Then the darkness came down.

With the dawn the position appeared more hopeless than ever. Hour after hour passed by. The sun rose high in the heavens, and then disappeared to the west. This pre-war crowded highway was deserted except for a bare speck that moved rapidly across the horizon. Towards sunset, feeling desperately hungry, they searched their pockets for possible food, and were rewarded by the discovery of a small bar of chocolate. This they divided into two careful portions, and



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prepared themselves for another night, cheering one another that with the daylight must come deliverance.

But the second day passed in similar manner, and night fell again. By this time they had exhausted their meagre supply of chocolate, and were almost mad with thirst. Worse, the floats were becoming sodden with the sea water and were sinking rapidly beneath the surface. They would last possibly another twenty-four hours, and then——

Late on the third day a long, low shape came tearing across the intervening space. They shouted themselves hoarse at the thought of possible rescue, when, with bitter disappointment, they discovered that the ensign at the stern was black and white. But Fortune would not desert them to this extent. By a miracle the Hun destroyer sped on without sighting them.

It was not until the fifth day that they were sighted by a British T.B.D., and were taken off, almost dead with starvation and exposure.

This, fortunately, is an isolated case. But the dangers and difficulties that seaplane pilots encounter are more terrifying than those of their brethren ashore. They may

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not experience the incessant bombardment from anti-aircraft artillery on the earth beneath. But even that danger is welcome when coupled with the knowledge that, the forced landing safely accomplished, one has yet a good chance of life, either as a prisoner, or inside our own lines. Over the sea there is very little hope. The adventure just quoted is one of the fortunate instances. How many good fellows have slipped away into the fading light never to return again, their mauled bodies and shattered craft lying somewhere at the bottom of the sea?

But such things must be before—and after—a famous victory. These treacherous sea limits must constantly be patrolled; for there lurks England's bitterest and most tenacious enemy—the sinister U-boat. The seaplane pilot must fly to and fro, to and fro, incessantly, until the great game is ended, and the snarling dogs of war have retired to their dark kennels.

And in this everlasting quest the small airship alone can help him. The latter shrouds her identity under a variety of nicknames. To some she is known as the 'Baby'—on account of her diminutive size; to others, as the 'Blimp,' and to the remainder,

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as the 'S-S'—submarine seeker, that pastime constituting her principal duty.

The graceful, cigar-like form of the 'Baby' is familiar from those early days of the war, when she was in constant quest to convoy our transports across Channel. She flies neither so high nor so low that the bed of the sea—in the shallower levels—cannot but be scanned with the ease of an open book. Londoners and visitors to holiday resorts around the coast will recognise the craft I mean. But, that sufficient for the moment, our matter lies with seaplanes.

At the seaplane station at X—, A—, an experienced and capable pilot, was out testing a new machine. The time arrived for his return. Half an hour went by, an hour, two hours! Then the alarm was raised, and a motor-boat was despatched hurriedly in search. After cruising round for some time, a dark square of wreckage was spotted on the horizon. The black, irregular shape that rose and fell, gently, to the motion of the sea might have been anything—an up-turned boat, a disused mast thrown overboard by some passing tramp, or a floating log—but the crew of the motor-boat guessed instantly. A gnawing apprehension seized

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their hearts, and they drove rapidly forward.

When they at length got alongside they found the seaplane overturned, the two great floats almost submerged by the water. Clinging to one of them was the gallant pilot, blue-faced, frozen with cold, but game to the end. They hauled him on board, inquiring the cause of the mishap. 'Unusual manœuvres underseas' was all the reply they could get. Then, almost pathetically, 'Anyone got a cigarette?'

Afterwards it appeared that, when landing, the machine had turned a complete somersault, throwing the pilot down beneath the surface and entangling him in the wreckage of wires and stays.

However, it is not necessary to fly out far to sea to seek adventure in a seaplane. Giving a display of excruciating banks—turns—and daring downward sweeps over a pier at a once well-known seaside resort on the east coast, a seaplane was seen to crash down into the shore. It happened so suddenly. One moment the craft had been flying majestically overhead, the next it was a mass of shapeless fabric lying in the edge of the sea. Mechanics hurried to the spot,

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prepared to find the badly mutilated body of the dead pilot. Instead, there rose slowly from the midst of the wreckage a sorrowful figure, immersed to his shoulders, spluttering salt water, and giving vent to his feelings in true nautical fashion.

On the lighter side we have the case of a dog belonging to a certain Squadron Commander in the R.N.A.S., not unknown in flying circles prior to the war. This animal is a dignified, touch-as-much-as-a-button-and-I'll-scream looking Scotch terrier, and holds all canine aviation records. He has been aloft in aeroplanes, seaplanes, and 'Blimps,' and never leaves his master's side. He even accompanied him as a prisoner to Holland, and now flies to and fro across the Channel at an average of two trips—home and return—per week. His method of flying is peculiarly his own. Immediately the craft is brought out of her shed, he wags his tail in knowing fashion, and climbs aboard, to fall promptly and conscientiously asleep, not waking again until the engine stops, and they have arrived across the way.

It is with a feeling of sincere regret that one must leave this pleasing interlude for the sterner realities of war, for a most unusual

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battle between sea and air that took place recently in the North Sea. The British steamer *Gena* was attacked by German sea-planes. She sighted them first, on the horizon, and made off at top speed. However, it was hopeless. Within a quarter of an hour they were over the top of her. Opening fire with their guns, the crew of the *Gena* succeeded in bringing one of the enemy craft down. Immediately the other machine swooped down to within a few hundred feet, and fired a torpedo at her amidships, and she sank like a stone.

Zeppelins, as well as submarines, form always and often legitimate prey to the flying boats. The stories are such that Homer would have immortalised in song. That is the reason they find expression in the Official reports in the curt manner that follows: 'Zeppelin L—— was destroyed this morning by our naval forces in the North Sea. Soon after being attacked she burst into flames, fore and aft, broke in two, and fell into the sea.'

Never a word as to the thrilling fight across the sea, and beneath the clouds, with the great craft of the air straining every nerve to shake off that incessant bombard-

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ment that will eventually bring her down a seething mass upon the surface of the water.

Even Kipling in 'The Fringes of the Fleet' tells us of a Zepp that, after shaking off two desperate seaplane pursuers, was comfortably making for home, when a British submarine popped her head out of the water fifty yards beneath him. For a second or so they gazed upon each other with mutual astonishment. Then the submarine's gun got busy, and the aircraft developed a passion for more healthy—and more cloudy altitudes.

But even the mind of a Kipling could not have imagined the sight of a flaming, flaring airship, hung up between the sun and the glittering blue waters of the sea, a flaming column of fire. The craft in question was a 'Baby' airship; one of ours out on patrol from an east coast air station was attacked at sea by an enemy seaplane. As far as can be ascertained there were no witnesses of the affair, but, according to the Admiralty Report:

'The position given is a considerable distance from the area in which the airship should have been working, and it is probable that her engine had failed, and that she had drifted a long distance with the wind.

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'Extensive search has been made where she fell, but no trace of the crew nor any portion of the ship has been found, and it must be assumed that all the crew are lost.'

And later the Germans admitted that their naval airmen off Nieuport had brought down an airship into the sea in flames.

But the Zeppelin is a gentleman, as his profession would guarantee. Not so the submarine, however. The meanest, dirtiest, most outrageous skunk of a craft that ever took the sea is he. In a deserted space of ocean he will sit browsing in the sun, and sending out urgent wireless calls and S.O.S.'s until some unsuspecting and humane merchantman noses across the horizon to his assistance, when he will shiver his bulkheads with a lightning torpedo.

Fortunately he makes his mistakes like other mortals. Engaged in this chivalrous pastime, a great U-boat lay off somewhere in the region of the South Coast, sizzling 'S.O.S.—S.O.S.—S.O.S.' Suddenly overhead there was the roar as of a thousand wings, and before he could submerge, a British sea-plane was on top of him, bombing furiously. With the third projectile she sank him, never to rise again, only leaving behind a great



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tell-tale patch of oil on the stretch of blue waters. There are many such stories that must await the happier—uncensored—days of after the war.

Between Germany and British East Africa, where the niggers compete with the revue ladies for simplicity of dress, there lies a great lake, V—— N——. Even to this remote corner of the earth grim war had extended its blood-stained operations, and the war was naval. There was an antediluvian, out-of-date German gun-boat that cruised round the numerous islands cowing bellicose natives. After August 1914 it changed its form of activity to the more pleasing hobby of bombarding K——a, which lay in British territory. This soon developed from being a nuisance into a positive menace. Two seaplanes were transported cross-country from M——. And then the fun began. The first favourable day the aircraft set out in search of the enemy. They came up with her, hidden away in a tiny creek in one of the distant islands. The gun-boat opened the engagement with a salvo from her A-A guns. The seaplane replied with an occasional bomb. For two hours the battle went on. Then, after having had one

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of her funnels blown away, and with a great hole in her bows, the gun-boat hoisted a white flag. Thus ended the naval war on V—— N——.

Along the English coast, where the early morning mist hung white and clammy along the shore, there blundered a heavy, clumsy aeroplane. Like a great hawk hovering over its prey, it hung above the mist, wheeling and turning, peering constantly earthwards for suspicious craft. Up above the weather was cold and dismal. The observer, slightly bored and more than a little heavy-eyed, leant back easily in his seat, and cursed the war and any other civilised project that brought a man tumbling out of his comfortable bed at this unseemly hour of the morning.

Below, the river, browned and muddied towards the banks. An upturned tub floated past. Vindictively he flung a piece of wood at it, and was about to lapse into his dreams again, when a fast-moving object caught and held his attention. It was straight and long, and thin, and was propelled through the water by some long, flat object beneath the surface. He wrote something down and handed it to the pilot. 'Submarine below.'

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The seaplane swooped down seawards. The look-out in the submarine caught her shadow, and turned rapidly for the open sea. But the seaplane was quicker. Down dropped a bomb, the water rose up in a great cascade. When the disturbance had cleared away, the frightened submarine was seen to be hugging the bank.

The seaplane hovered overhead. Again she tried to make for the open sea, again she was bombed. And again, scared out of her life, she turned for the shore, and ran on to a sand-bank. There she stuck. For two hours the seaplane hovered above, wirelessly the news to —, who despatched three T.B.S. By the time they came alongside, the tide had gone down and the submarine was left high and dry.

And the next high tide the submarine was towed off into harbour.

# **The Navy that Flies**



## CHAPTER XI

### The Navy that Flies

**T**HE Navy that Flies' was the brilliant inspiration of that brilliant writer 'Bartimeus.' The Navy that Flies; the Navy that patrols every mighty sea and many a shallow backwater and swamp-ridden creek in every quarter of the globe; the offspring of the oldest of our Services.

At first the parent body was inclined to look askance at this new and troublesome offspring. There is something a little irritating, you know, in a Johnny that flaps about over flag-ships and Dreadnoughts with the same air of condescension as though they were a mere string of barges; who has two 'blind' eyes for even the autocratic signals of an Admiral of the Fleet, and can keep an entire cruiser complement—with 9'2 and 15 inchers complete—on tenterhooks with a miserable bomb the size of a Christmas pudding.

This sort of thing, decided Navy major, must be sat upon; and forthwith there streamed out, on choicest Whitehall paper,

## Glorious Exploits of the Air

a string of regulations as long as the south coast, and as extensive as Arthur J. Balfour's metaphysics. But it was little better than useless. The Navy that Flies perused the catalogue over their evening coat-tails, and, sleeping, blithely forgot them with the next day's sun.

Then the older body began to get curious. 'We must look into this,' said they among themselves, and, behold, admirals and flag-captains and First Lords so far forgot their dignity as to go flapping round in the clouds themselves. Down they came a little shaken, highly delighted, and with more than a sneaking admiration for the courage of these daring young men. The Navy that Flies were, thenceforth, left in peace, regulations forgotten.

Round the coast sprang up air stations in all directions. The few antediluvian airships were taken over from the Army. The war broke out. And the 'Navy that Flies' settled down to serious business.

Strategically they are the defensive arm of the Air Service. Their business it is to guard our coasts from all aerial invaders. And only when the Fleet goes into action do they assume the defensive. As witness the raid on Cuxhaven in the early stages of the



### A MESSAGE FROM THE SKY.

The regulation method adopted by British seaplanes for dropping messages to patrol-boats is as follows : the message is tied to a piece of wood, so that it will float, and a long streamer of ribbons or thin cloth is attached to it, which calls attention to the communication and prevents its falling with dangerous speed.





## The Navy that Flies

war, and the seaplane in the Jutland Battle. For the rest their business is to patrol the coasts and the home-waters, always having a wary eye open for enemy submarines; to escort the fleet; and, when occasion so requires, to support the Army ashore.

“Of course, we know all about these naval johnnies,” said the ‘Army that Flies,’ wrote Bartimeus; “they’d steal grey paint from their dying grandmothers, and they fear nothing in the heavens above nor the earth beneath, nor the waters under the earth. They are complaining that things are getting a bit dull along the coast. . . . We might show them a thing or two if they cared to join up with us for a while.” “Let’s ask them,” said the Army. So the Navy that Flies was invited to “co-operate with the Royal Flying Corps on such portions of the line where its experience of escort work and offensive patrols would prove of the greatest value.” Or words to that effect.’

How far the idea was successful may be gathered from the following quotations from a recent honours list:

‘Under his command the squadron developed into a most efficient and formidable fighting force.’ ‘For conspicuous skill and

## Glorious Exploits of the Air

gallantry during the past eighteen months.' 'He is a brilliant pilot.' 'His machine has been constantly under heavy anti-aircraft fire for long periods while carrying out his work.' 'He has taken part in numerous bomb raids with successful results.' 'On one occasion he returned with forty holes in his machine.' 'For conspicuous skill as a seaplane pilot during the last nine months.' 'On one occasion he descended to a hundred feet and on another occasion to three hundred feet before releasing his bombs.'

Meanwhile the R.N.A.S. had been specialising in every branch of aviation. For now, practically every man must be, or become, a specialist of some sort. The squadrons and flights are organised for particular duties. Highly specialised are the machines. Even the aerodromes themselves begin to lose their omnibus character, and specialise on some form of operation.

And, in specialising, the Navy the Flies became aware that the work of the Flying Army that deals alone with aeroplanes was mere child's play compared with a Service that took on Home Defence, Military offensives, kite-balloons, seaplanes, airships, and aeroplanes in a single breath.

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In two short years they evolved an entirely new shibboleth of precedents, customs, and manners. They developed individual initiative, resource, quickness of mind, and, above all, a sporting, chivalrous spirit. And, not content with this, they included in the lexicon of their air pilots and observers, such quaint terms as 'quirks,' youthful aviators in embryonic stage; 'buses' and 'kites,' aeroplanes both great and small; 'stunts,' trips into the air; 'gadgets,' for every miscellaneous article whose original terminology did not meet with their approval; 'cold-feet,' a far from pleasant feeling of nervousness in mid-air; 'pan-cake,' to fall in a horizontal direction to the ground; 'gas-bags,' airships and balloons; 'Randy Rupert,' the unbeautiful kite-balloon.

Skimming over hedges and trees, like a giant grasshopper, they termed 'zumming.' All manner of tricks in mid-air were styled 'stunts.' 'Nose-diving,' 'stalling,' 'spinning,' 'putting her down,' 'shoving her up,' were all varied manœuvres with aeroplanes. And even for the latter they created such terms as 'Bristol Bullet,' 'Bloater,' 'Scout,' 'Camel,' 'Sopwith Pup,' and 'B.E.'

While 'baggage' constitutes the observer.

## Glorious Exploits of the Air

Incendiary A-A shells are 'flaming onions.' 'Gedoonk' is the burst of an 'Archie.' An 'Immelmann turn' is a steep turn close to the ground. And a patrol over the enemy's lines is a 'chuka.'

Thus fortified, the Navy that Flies got to business. Somewhere in France she knew that her offspring were rendering yeoman service; likewise in Palestine, Mesopotamia, India, Egypt, Salonica, Italy, and British East Africa. Along the east coast they were faithfully guarding the shores of Great Britain. And somewhere over the North Sea—at lengthy intervals—they were scouting for enemy submarines.

Those submarines! Already we have discussed them at great length; but they still persist in cropping up.

'Another—an aeroplane—disabled on the water of an enemy's port, succeeded in getting his engine going as the crew of an armed trawler were leaning over the bows with boat-hooks to secure him. He rose from the water beneath their outstretched hands, and recalled with breathless merriment nothing but the astonishment on the Teutonic faces.

'A third, similarly disabled, was approached on the surface by a German sub-

## The Navy that Flies

marine. He raked her deck with his Lewis gun and kept her at bay—by the simple expedient of picking off every head that appeared above her conning tower—until she wearied of the sport and withdrew. From a seaplane point of view it was a pretty jest.

‘The Navy that Flies is quickly building up its own peculiar and imperishable traditions. Not least of these is the seaplanes’ invincible gaiety of spirit.’

One sunny afternoon a wireless report was received at D——, from a reconnaissance scout, that hostile destroyers were out along the coast. Off went three British naval machines to attack them.

After some two hours’ flight they sighted five enemy craft steaming below B—— and Z—— in a north-easterly direction, five miles off the coast. Down they sped to a lower altitude; down went three bombs almost simultaneously; and three more, and three more!—sixteen being dropped in all with one direct hit on the leading destroyer.

The remainder of the enemy craft scattered and broke in all directions. Again they were bombed furiously. The leading destroyer was observed to take a list to port, and

## Glorious Exploits of the Air

remained stationary. The rest of the craft made off for harbour at top speed.

Then a hostile seaplane attacked our machines, but was easily driven off. And later, where originally five Hun destroyers had passed the long mole at the entrance to Z—— harbour, but four again returned.

Before starting off for a flight, and already sitting in his 'bus,' one of the R.N.A.S. humorists drew back his control-stick after the manner of drawing an imaginary glass of beer, smacked his lips with due appreciation, and carefully adjusted a monocle in his left eye. Then he flew off.

Two hours later, after a great morning's work, and with his machine literally riddled with bullets, he made a graceful return landing. And, taking his monocle from his eye, and dusting it appreciably, he condescended 'That it had been quite a good "stunt."'

Ashore they differ no whit, these cool pilots of the Navy that Flies.

One attacked in succession three hostile scouts: 'The first he drove down under control, the second turned over on its back after he had hit the pilot, and went down through the clouds, and the third, which he

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attacked from a distance of twenty yards, descended completely out of control. Running short of ammunition while attacking a fourth enemy scout, he returned to the advanced landing ground, replenished his supply, and, going up again, attacked another hostile formation, one of which he forced down out of control.

‘The next day he compelled a hostile two-seater machine to land on our side of the lines after wounding the observer. Six days later he was killed.’

Another, while landing, had the misfortune to crash through some trees. As he was ruefully surveying the wreck of his machine, a very self-important staff officer came up.

‘You’ve had a smash, I suppose?’ he remarked.

For a moment the exasperated pilot just looked at him. Then: ‘Oh, n-no,’ he stutted dangerously. ‘I always l-land l-like this.’ The Staff Officer flushed hotly. ‘Perhaps you don’t know who I am?’ he exclaimed. ‘What’s your name?’

‘I-I’ve forgotten the b-bally thing,’ was the quick retort. ‘B-but you’ll find my number on the tail-plane.’



## Glorious Exploits of the Air

Almost a similar incident was that of the pilot who wedged his machine firmly on top of a high tree. While waiting to be rescued came to him another high and mighty official.

‘What are you doing up there?’ he shouted.

‘Oh, that’s all right’ was the pilot’s reply. ‘Don’t you worry, I’m just playing at being a little dicky-bird, and this is my nest.’

The Navy that Flies did not wait long to get to business when they went over to the other side. Two hours after their arrival at the new aerodrome, one adventurous youth was up skimming over the enemy country, when he discovered, through the clouds, and to his extreme enjoyment, a Hun training-school below him. For a few minutes he stood watching from behind a great grey cloud. Then, down he swooped, shooting down four and scattering the remainder. The squadron, made aware of this adventure, gravely concluded that the Golden Age had come.

Two hours before making a reconnaissance over the German lines, a pilot was sternly rebuked, by the other members of

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his mess, for lighting three cigarettes from one match.

'It is tempting fate,' they told him. But he laughed loud and long at their foolish superstition, and afterwards returned from a particularly gallant deed that won him a coveted V.C.

What time the 'Gentlemen of England' were, if not abed, at least complaining of their shaving water, he encountered two Halberstadts and an Albatross. He started off by pumping a tray of lead into the leading machine, and she went spinning down to earth. At this a veritable hornet's nest rose about his ears. Up came three more Albatrosses, the pilot of one of which, according to his official report, 'showed his head precisely in the ring of the British pilot's sight.' The latter further recalls that he 'actually saw three bullets strike the other's head, when he heeled over and spun to the ground.'

By this time he was only two hundred feet above the enemy territory, and, having shaken off his pursuers, determined to make his base at that altitude. This he accomplished through a hail of machine-gun and rifle bullets, encountering, *en route*, an astonished squadron of German cavalry, who

## Glorious Exploits of the Air

drew rein and peppered him with rifle shots as he whisked over the top of their lances.

But it is while driving off enemy air-raids that we are more familiar with these young men. A thrilling account of a pilot participating in one of these 'stunts' is given as follows:

'Flight Lieutenant — is stationed at a home aerodrome for a rest after nervous trouble on the other side. He employed that rest time in chasing raiding airmen.

'At nine sharp there came a curt message over the telephone wires "Enemy aircraft approaching East Coast, near S——: Prepare to stand by." This developed into "Considerable number of hostile aircraft over the Isle of Thanet and East Essex at 9.20." Ten minutes later every available machine was in the air.

'The morning was misty, the wind was toughish from a N.N.W. direction. How misty one could not realise until well up into a high altitude. Barely visible to our left, dignified and serene, the Metropolis nestled on either bank of the winding river—now a dull, grey line nosing its way into the slight smoke that lay over London.

'What's that? As difficult for the enemy

## The Navy that Flies

to see the earth? Depends. According to most people, they were flying at a particularly low altitude, probably to insure accuracy of aim with their bomb dropping.

‘However, it took us all our time scouring round for the Boches. Below lay acre after acre of green field, with here and there the black smudge of town and village. All so peaceful; so typically Blighty. One could almost imagine the gay crowds below, calmly going about their daily occupations, never dreaming that within quarter of an hour of them, and speeding on a hundred miles and more an hour, were those messengers of destruction.

‘One moment, a peaceful July morning, all sunshine and blue sky; the next, the fair face of the Heavens blotted out with battling aircraft, and sinister grey shrapnel bursts—the whole setting seeming so painfully incongruous. England! Over there it might be Ypres. There, below the battling *mêlée*, the long, grey line of shell-pitted trenches.

‘Realisation dawns with the squadrons of defending aeroplanes that come winging up from all quarters. The air seems alive with them.

‘At last the enemy come into view. One

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cannot stifle a momentary admiration for their splendid airmanship; two squadrons, firm and sure, that move never an inch out of line, despite the terrific gun bombardment and the incessant aeroplane attacks.

‘On our right is witnessed the finest “stunt” of the day. One of “ours,” with splendid daring, dives nose on for a squadron of enemy machines. Develops a terrific machine-gun duel. True as a die they keep their course. Almost it seems by preconceived plan. Now he is through them, to the other side. Herr enemy has all the luck to-day, but our man has not yet finished with them. His is a fast machine, and, before we may turn, he has wheeled, and is in the middle of them again. But again he is unsuccessful.

‘Now it is our turn. We fire desperately, rapidly. They pass on haughtily oblivious—or is it, rather, the one objective that is ever uppermost in their minds? By this time they have regained formation. Down from the north-east they sweep, with a treacherous wind to port. Their bombs begin to fall; the firing reopens with renewed intensity. The air is ablaze with shrapnel.

‘They can never return from that inferno.

## The Navy that Flies

But within twenty minutes they are back again, fleeing desperately eastwards. And stranger still, from the roof-tops of the city ominous smoke whiffs curl heavenwards. Three of the machines lag to the rear. One is dropping perceptibly. Like a swarm of wasps our men are biting on to his tail. Then two other enemy craft fall back from their rear-guard—evidently two of their battleplanes—and, with a desperate effort, he again rises. The running fight continues. Too far to the north of us; unfortunately, we may only look on.

‘Blue sky! Smoking grey earth! Here a wing tip flashing in the sun. There three machines wheeling, diving, climbing in a bunch, from which it is impossible to differentiate friend or foe. The battle line flung as far as the eye could sweep; single duels, the main body in a fanlike formation, beating off desperate attacks. To the right a detached squadron, engaged with a similar number of British machines. All moving eastward, as rapidly as their latest type engines will carry them.

‘How soon it is over. Only a moment it seems since first we took the air. But in that brief while must be agony, devastation,

## Glorious Exploits of the Air

and pain beyond imagination in that closely packed grey area.

‘They are disappearing over the sky-line. But the fight has only just begun. Back there will be fresh reinforcements awaiting them. Back there the fight will rage anew. Back there will be decided whether or no they repeat this insolent performance.

‘Downward to earth. And even as we land, cursing our miserable bad fortune, there is still to be heard that dull yap of the guns towards the coast.

‘Later will come the result of the engagement. And what is it to be?’

## **Fresh from France**





## CHAPTER XII

### Fresh from France

**F**OR every plane there is a story; for every pilot, an adventure; for every square mile of surface, some memorable deed. It may be at the dawn. It may be at sunset. It may be when the grey fog comes creeping from behind the hills. It may be when darkness shrouds the craft: when she is alone audible, and that a droning, moaning hum, untraceable and unplaceable.

In that kingdom of adventure in the clouds, possibility knows no limit, nor impossibility. At every hour, and at every place the story is the same, yet different in detail. There was a young Frenchman who flew, through shell and mishap, five hundred miles, with a Heaven-sent wind and a fourteen hour supply of petrol, for the satisfaction of dropping a proclamation on Berlin. That is but typical of this strange adventure world.

Past nine o'clock of a still summer's evening was it that heard him circling skywards over the red roofs of Nancy. And

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who of the idle curious that caught a glimpse of his white and blue, and red-ringed tail floating off into the darkness, knew that the next day's sun was to witness that self-same tail pirouetting gracefully over Berlin? Who could imagine the torture adventures of that long night of travail: the eerie loneliness of those dark hours, the numbing cold of the night-laden breeze, or the cruel redbite of the shrapnel stinging the night sky unexpectedly by his side?

The length of the enemy country to be traversed: frontier to frontier, as much as the crow—or man bird—may fly: from the snow-capped Juras to the sluggish waters of the lordly Vistula. Airman Sub-Lieut. Marchal was a daring young man. Sheer audacity carried him to that vain-glorious city on the Spree, where the inhabitants fled beer tables and dancing halls to gaze panic-stricken skyward at this bold intruder. Their fears and anxieties they might well have saved themselves. For nothing more harmful than parchment proclamations came floating earthward on the morning air. And they no more alarming than: 'We could have bombarded the open town of Berlin and thus killed innocent women and children, but we

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content ourselves with merely dropping a proclamation.'

So bold a narrative should, by every right, have a final setting of ringing welcome cheers, and greeting, outstretched hands. Instead there is the story of a fickle engine that failed inopportunately, bringing her pilot down at Cholm in Poland (fifty miles west of Kovel), less than sixty-six miles from the Russian lines: and after a flight of eleven hours. Fortune is not always the prize of the brave.

Out into the dark fled a fighting squadron one night in well-ordered formation, with their Squadron-Commander at their head, and he with the phosphorus bomb signal at his tail.

Somewhere ahead lay an ammunition dump that was to be bombed skyward in a sheet of flame. But as they skimmed the lines at a bare two hundred feet, a flashing 'Archie' took the leader and rocketed him to earth.

Down on to the shell-plugged earth he came, and nosed head-first into a deep shell-hole. Fortunately he was uninjured. But the phosphorus bomb going off at that moment caught him before he had time to clear the

## Glorious Exploits of the Air

hole, and he scrambled over the top, a mass of flame.

Blindly he stumbled on, until, with a gasp of relief, he reached a small pond, into which he plunged headlong.

Hearing his cry for help, artillerymen in the neighbourhood rushed to his aid, and carried him to the hospital, three miles across a shell-swept area.

These matters of our own pilots: but what of the enemy? Of him writes H. G. Wells: 'The ordinary German has neither the flexible quality of body, the quickness of nerve, the temperament nor the mental habits that make a successful airman. This idea was first put into my head by considering the way in which Germans walk and carry themselves, and by noting the difference in the nimbleness of cyclists in French and German towns. It was confirmed by a conversation I had with a German aviator, who was also a dramatist, and who came to see me about some copyright matter in 1912. He broached the view that aviation would destroy democracy because he said that only aristocrats would make aviators. (He was a man of good family.) With a duke or so in my mind, I asked him why. "Because,"

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he said, "a man without aristocratic quality in tradition cannot possibly endure the 'high loneliness' of the air." That sounded rather like nonsense at the time, then I reflected that for a Prussian that might be true. There may be something in the German composition that does demand association, and the support of pride and training before dangers can be faced. The Germans are social and methodical, the French and English by comparison chaotic and instinctive: perhaps the very readiness for a conscious orderliness that makes the German see the formidable upon the ground, so thorough, and so foreseeing makes him slow and unsure in the air. At any rate, the experiences of this war have seemed to carry out this hypothesis.

The first phase then of the highest grade offensive, the ultimate development of war, regardless of expense, is the capture of the air. Such German machines as are up are put down by fighting aviators. These last fly high: in the clear blue of the early morning they look exactly like gnats: some trail a little smoke in the sunshine: they take their machine-guns in pursuit over the German lines, and the German anti-aircraft guns, the

## Glorious Exploits of the Air

Archibalds, begin to pattern the sky about them with little balls of black smoke. From below one does not see men nor feel that men are there: it is as if it were an affair of midges.'

But, however stolid they may be in this respect, we have had unfortunate experience of the skill of the enemy as regarding scientific engines of destruction: of the giant howitzers that crumbled the impregnable fortresses of Liege into crumbling ashes: of liquid fire that licks and ravages across the barren space of No Man's Land. Of the nauseous green gas that sweeps death and destruction through the air: this gas that caught a British pilot, one summer morning in mid-air.

He had swept down to within a few hundred feet to clear an enemy trench, when suddenly his head began to throb dizzily. A giant hand clutched his throat. But he set his jaw, and eventually made home. When he crossed the lines, he must have been partially unconscious. For eye-witnesses state, he came through a hail of rifle, machine, and anti-aircraft bullets without budging an inch.

And what glorious feat is this latter, witnessed from the ground! A frail aeroplane

## Fresh from France

that appears every moment as if no power can save it from being utterly demolished by the stinging shrapnel bursts which surround it on all sides: but moving never to right nor to left. It appears the acme of cold-blooded daring. Though that depends on the period it is carried through.

Typical: an R.F.C. pilot, on a reconnaissance flight over a line of ammunition dumps. Particularly these sheds the Germans wished to be left alone. And to ensure this necessary secrecy, the surrounding country was dotted with A-A guns in every possible corner: not to mention two powerful squadron of defensive aeroplanes. But this fact worried the Englishman not a whit.

Through a desperate salvo of flying shrapnel he made one reconnaissance along the line: then calmly turned and made another. This was too much for the enemy, who sent up one of his fighting squadrons, who intercepted the raider half-way. The fight was short and sharp. Two enemy machines went down, and our man resumed his patrol. At the other end he met the other enemy squadron. And, after chasing them two miles across country, turned, and made his reconnaissance a third time.



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In the same way two of our machines in the Eastern Mediterranean went out one day to obtain photographs of a certain harbour. Arrived there, they encountered two enemy fighting craft. Indifferently armed themselves, they managed to achieve their object by dividing forces. While one took photographs, the other hovered round overhead, driving off the enemy attacks. During this one-sided engagement—in which, eventually, the hostile machines were driven off—one of our machines was hit, and forced to descend. Immediately he set fire to his machine.

Down swept his companion to his rescue. When he landed the first man clambered on to the cowl of his machine. And thus they made off, barely avoiding a large contingent of the enemy, who were already racing towards them, firing as they came.

One of the most alarming air adventures of the war was that which recently befell Captain Beauchamps of the French Air Service, during a particularly daring raid on Munich.

While he was over the city he was caught in a violent storm. To avoid destruction he decided it would be wiser for him not to attempt to return to his base, but fly round the storm, and so make for Italy.

## Fresh from France

Numerous German aeroplanes pursued him, *en route*, but, eventually, he was fortunate enough to land in friendly territory, near Venice.

Another curious adventure was that of a German balloon that descended on a small southern Danish island. There was no crew aboard. But only a form of printed instructions: to telegraph at once where the balloon landed to the 1st Balloon Battalion at Berlin. They would then send for it and pay all expenses. The purposes for which such a balloon would be sent out cannot be easily understood.

So much for the pure adventure side. But, apropos that subject, dangers differ little with the pilot of the skies, whether on home or active service. The same risks must be run: the same possible mishap and terrifying death lie before either.

The wilfully spectacular is but little removed from the desperate encounter in the clouds. His Majesty the King was a highly interested spectator of one of these displays during his recent visit to France.

And of this particular incident wrote Beach Thomas in the *Daily Mail*: 'Wherever he moved the air was full of our planes—

## Glorious Exploits of the Air

land-planes and seaplanes, flying at all altitudes, some escorting him, some passing this way and that on their way to and from the fighting.

‘I suppose the King must have seen hundreds. At one point he had a long talk with a group of young naval airmen, who had just come back from a raid and were full of native delight at their success. He visited two large aerodromes and watched a number of the best pilots do what they call “fancy stunts”—all those new varieties of the tumbler pigeon’s art that are daily performed with more speed and abandonment as the machines and the science of their management improve. But the King was always more interested in the man than the machine, as behoves the King of his people.’

And in the human side lies the sole interest in flying. Things? Who cares for things, when there are flesh and blood human stories for the asking? Things, technicalities, theories, are for the narrow technical press. They thrive upon them. But they hold but a pin-prick percentage, and count very, very little in the great outside world.

And of these human stories, the best is undoubtedly that of Wing-Commander Briggs,

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R.N., D.S.O. Of his striking story, the Press Bureau have, so far, made but the slightest reference. But it was a magnificent performance.

Briefly then: in November 1914, Briggs was awarded the Legion of Honour for bombing a Zeppelin factory at Friedrichshafen. And almost immediately afterwards he was brought down within the German lines while participating in a reconnaissance raid. The story of his escape after two and a half years imprisonment is a matter for after the war. Military requirements do not admit of such a procedure at the present moment.



# The German Air Services



## CHAPTER XIII

### The German Air Services

**P**LEASANT it is to write of a powerful unit of a Military Power that has shed its caste under the essence of a series of diabolical deeds that have alienated the sympathies of the world: its greatest distinction lies in the fact that it has so far violated the principles of German savagery, ashore and at sea, to have fought the campaign throughout with chivalry and honour.

The 'bon camaradie' that has developed between the enemy service and our own dates back to the days when a British airman was earthed in their country by shrapnel, and his squadron informed of the unfortunate one's plight by a note dropped from an enemy raiding machine. Since that time the custom has never lapsed. The appreciation was mutual, as evidenced by our pilots, and an incident that recently occurred in Berlin. There, at an exhibition of 'Air War Booty,' a department was devoted to Boelke, the renowned Fokker pilot, and a wreath of



## Glorious Exploits of the Air

violets was on show, from the pilots of the R.F.C., 'In memory of a gallant and noble enemy.'

However, more than a little surprised is the average German at the attitude adopted by our pilots as regards war flying. This surprisedness moved General von Höppner, C.-in-C., of the German Air Services, to remark: 'The English show in air fights that they are of the Germanic race, for they seek fight and fight until either they or their opponents are killed . . . while we Germans consider every flight as a military act, for the British flying is but sport, but when it comes to a fight, good sport.'

Almost the first in history was the enemy Air Service, the Zeppelin wing dating back to 1904, the aeroplane service to 1906, and the balloon to 1890, when a military school was established in Munich.

In the early days feeling ran high between the 'heavier' and 'lighter than air' craft partisans. The public, after openly deriding, were too satisfied with their giant airships to bother with aeroplanes. Thus two staff officers followed the Wilbur-Orville-Wright experiments at Auvours and Paris in the most profound secrecy, and, in the same

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manner, a cavalry officer was trained by Orville Wright at Potsdam.

The following year the Government, to encourage construction and design, offered large money prizes. And, in 1913, £350,000 was raised by public subscription, to provide machines for Army and Navy. During the next twelve months the output was trebled until, at the outbreak of hostilities, the German service was composed of 850 aeroplanes, and 1000 pilots, 50 seaplanes and 70 pilots, and 30 Zeppelins and 80 pilots. To-day, in round figures, that aggregate has increased to 300,000 men of all ranks, and 20,000 varied craft. Throughout the policy has been to develop aircraft—except for a modest Zeppelin passenger service—for military purposes. But, until recent months, they have assumed a defensive war policy with seaplanes and aeroplanes: allowing our men the initiative, and giving fight only on their side of the lines, where British pilots have been surrounded, suddenly, by large squadrons of machines, or led into a trap over a rocket battery.

With the Zeppelin it has been different. The latter is the embodiment of Teuton Kultur. To slay and destroy without danger appealed to the German Authorities strongly.

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Hence the numerous raids on this country. The object was two-fold. Both moral and military results were anticipated. Though aviation matter in general was sternly censored from the papers, the Press was allowed to boom the Zeppelin raids to the last column. Whether these raids were a legitimate form of warfare is hardly the matter to discuss in these pages, further than to say to those who are clamouring for reprisals: it is difficult to raid a country where the population is composed for the most part of our unfortunate Allies.

In obtaining the necessary personnel, the enemy experience as little difficulty as ourselves. The 'Air Service is as popular as with British youths. Moreover, it is considered the crack corps, more desirable than the 'Death's Head Hussars' or the 'Prussian Guards,' the Kaiser's body-guard.

The majority of candidates are the elder sons of the best families, while boys in their cradles have their names entered on the waiting list of the corps.

The method of training is excellent. Before any attempt is made at flying, the pupil is sent for a course to a manufacturing firm, where he is initiated into the construc-

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tion of craft and engine from the earliest stages. Thence he will be transferred to Naval or Military wings as necessity arises.

The flying schools are dotted about in all parts of the country: at Johannisthal—the Hendon of Germany—Königsberg, Posen, Danzig, Putzig, Metz, Munich, Breslau, Kiel, Hamburg, Wilhelmshaven, Dusseldorf, Cologne, Frankfurt, &c., with war bases at Friedrichshafen—Army Headquarters; Heli-goland—Naval Headquarters; Zeebrugge, Ghistelles, and Evéry, the principal Zeppelin base.

The period occupied in training aeroplane and seaplane pilots ranges from three to four months. The education of the Zeppelin pilot is a more protracted affair. For three weeks there is a series of assembling, aerostatics, and engine lectures; also construction, navigation, meteorological, and fabric constructing classes. At the end of that time the cadet is expected to take down and reassemble the engine, and 'box' and steer a course by compass. A monthly examination is held, and if unable to obtain seventy per cent. of the marks granted, he will be asked to resign.

At last the new hand is permitted to fly. Types of the older Zeppelins are reserved for

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this purpose. Batches of five are sent up in charge of an experienced pilot—usually one with a deal of active service experience, who has participated in a raid on this country. The uses of the rudder, propeller, ailerons, and elevator are explained to them; also the best method of getting off and landing.

On the second trip aloft the batch is allowed to manœuvre the craft.

Next they are sent up singly with an instructor, and fly unaided for two or three hours. Then, having made satisfactory progress, the new hand is sent up alone. Upon the manner in which he handles the craft his future depends. If successful he is permitted to qualify for a certificate.

Some considerable portion of the training period is devoted to bomb dropping practice, the targets being large pieces of timber floating on the surface of Lake Constance, so fashioned to represent battleships. There follow cross country flights for navigational purposes—trips from Friedrichshafen to Berlin, returning the following day, or round trip to Breslau and Hamburg—then to the more serious business of war raids.

To participate in these raids is considered a signal honour by officers. 'Such an attack

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on England is grand,' remarked a pilot recently, 'if only we had not got to write out the damned report of the thing afterwards.' The diffidence of the men, however, of the last few months has caused the authorities much anxiety. To insure a sufficiency of personnel, the rank and file are almost press-ganged into the Service, and, once there, are in grave danger of being shot if orders are not promptly obeyed.

A curious point in connection with the officer pilots in command is, that they differ with every raid. Thus the leader of the first daylight aeroplane raid was reported by the *Cologne Gazette* as Captain Brandenburg. And apropos this particular raid the same paper hands out further comment as follows:

'Even from the tearful and distorted English reports it can be recognised that this attack on London was one of the heaviest which ever took place, and that consequently also the military damage, which the English naturally keep secret, must have been tremendous.'

Another air leader was Captain Victor Schutz, commander of the ill-fated Z48, brought down by our guns while partici-

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pating in a recent Zeppelin raid. He was a man much 'wanted' by our airmen.

A good pilot is boomed in the Press, an almost daily reference being made to his success in bringing down enemy craft. This is part of the propaganda scheme for spreading news in neutral countries. Among the best known of these newspaper prodigies have been Immelmann, Bolcke, Captain Baron von Richthofen (with a press accredited aggregate of one hundred Allied machines), Lieutenant Wolff (with twenty-nine), and Lieutenant Schæfer (with twenty-five machines to his credit).

The best pilots of all are chosen for two large squadrons, known respectively as 'von Bulow's Circus' and 'von Richthofen's Circus,' each composed of twenty-five to thirty-five machines.

These 'circuses' make periodical trips from aerodrome to aerodrome, giving spectacular displays, the object being to impress and encourage the men training there.

Another and somewhat older organisation is the 'Infanterieflieger'—an infantry—whose duty is to keep in constant touch with the infantry, and ascertain movements of the enemy's troops. Flying very low the Air

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Infantry hover over the trenches, noting the enemy positions, preparatory to an attack. If they are without anti-aircraft guns, they attack them with machine-guns and bombs.

The military value of this unit may be gauged by an excerpt from a recent official *communiqué*: 'If it were not for the skill and speed of the Air Infantry the enemy artillery barrage would deprive the German High Command of all opportunity of controlling events in the foremost firing lines.'

In similar fashion to our own Service, the army airmen have now a lexicon of their own, as the following partial glossary will show: Observation Officer, Franz; Pilot, Emil; Zeppelin, Puffed up Rival; Observation Balloons, Honeymoons; Inefficient pilots, Shipwreckers; Danger zones, Windy corners; Bringing enemy down, Giving him something sour; Brought down by enemy, Getting something sour.

With regard to the craft, the advent of the Zeppelin was one of the most important events in the history of aviation. The romantic history of the indefatigable Count is too familiar for repetition, further than to say: after a period of great hostility on the



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part of the public, it was the word of the 'All Highest' that turned the scales, and made it possible for the old man to proceed further with his invention. Royal sanction was given by letter as follows: 'Since your varied flights have been reported to me, it is a great pleasure to me to express my acknowledgment of your patience and your labours, and the endurance with which you have pressed on through manifold hindrances till success was near. The advantages of your system have given your ship the greatest attainable speed and dirigibility, and the important results you have obtained have produced an epoch-making step forward in the construction of airships, and have laid down a valuable basis for future experiments.'

Another royal personage to come forward to Zeppelin's aid was the King of Württemberg, and by 1913 he had laid down a fleet of some ten vessels ranging from 353,000 to 776,900 feet capacity, including the *Victoria Louise*, *Hansa*, and *Suchard*. The principle of construction adopted throughout was a standardisation of parts. The ships were built up at Friedrichshafen, Mannheim, Rheinau, and Potsdam. To-day there are six different types. The first has a capacity of 1,906,200

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cubic feet, with six 250 h.p. six cylinder Maybach engines, and an armament of six maxim guns. The second class has a capacity of 2,471,000 cubic feet with seven 250 h.p. Maybach engines, and armament of six maxim guns and four tons of explosives; the third, a capacity of 1,059,000 cubic feet, and armament of four maxims and two tons of bombs; the fourth, a capacity of 1,235,000 cubic feet, with six 210 h.p. Maybach engines. For the other two classes, number five has a capacity of 1,059,000 cubic feet, with four 240 h.p. Mercedes engines, and armament of five maxims and one and a half tons of bombs; number six a capacity of 943,000 cubic feet, with four 210 h.p. six cylinder Maybach engines, and an armament of four maxims and one and a half tons of bombs.

Of the aeroplanes the better known types are the Fokker, Gotha, Taube, and Albatross. The latest machine of the latter type possesses h.p. of between 180 and 200, can develop a speed of over 120 miles an hour, and can climb with amazing rapidity. Other machines are the giant biplanes that are under construction at Friedrichshafen, some of which have actually been observed flying over Lake Constance. These craft are 75 feet across, have

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four engines, and carry a crew of six. Others are 317 feet across with three 200 h.p. motors.

Double fusilage craft there are in plenty, as the Aviatik, with wing spread of 78 feet. The steering is accomplished by three rudders, and there are seats for an observer and gunner behind the pilot, also for another gunner in the nose of the machine. The Halberstadt is perhaps the latest craft of all. In appearance it resembles a Morane, and is fitted with a 240 h.p. Benz engine. These new craft all possess great ascensional power and speed, and they are capable of rising to a height of between 17,000 and 20,000 feet.

The Gotha—which is the machine invariably employed in raiding this country—is really a triple fusilage aeroplane, though possessing two engines, which are situated one on either side of the main body. It is the fighting ‘bus’ *par excellence*, having accommodation for a pilot who sits in the centre of the machine, with a gunner in front and in the rear of him, with a trap door in the bottom of the body to enable them to fire downwards. The span of the machine is 78 feet 6 inches; the length 41 feet. The armament consists, in addition to the machine guns, of three bomb tubes, holding

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144 bombs, in rear of the wings. These particulars were obtained from a machine of this type brought down recently by Captain Guynemer in France.

The Roland, Rumpler, and Aviatik are the more popular of the two-seater aeroplanes. The L.V.G. and the A.E.G. are two new and powerful types of aeroplanes that are going to cause us considerable anxiety in the near future.

Finally, the enemy, like ourselves, is strenuously considering the after-war problems of aviation. At Vienna, May 1917, a meeting was called at the invitation of the Austria Aero Club to consider ways and means of establishing permanent aerial communication between Austria-Hungary, Germany, Turkey, and Bulgaria; also to draw up a fresh code of aerial laws. The German delegate at the meeting was the famous Major von Tshudi, one of the pioneers in the development of naval and military air services, and founder of the Johannisthal aerodrome.

The outcome of the meeting was a bill licensing the 'Central European International Aerial Traffic Company Limited' to develop a network of air routes between the four forementioned states.

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But it must be understood that it is not the details of the scheme that are being considered, but the more important matter of the questions arising from the introduction of aerial lines, among them that of the matter of whether the State will leave control to the private companies, or shall itself subsidise them. Also the transport of imperial mails, landing stages, and the arrangements for customs inspections.

According to the *Tagliche Rundschau* (*Daily Review*): 'The company's scheme provides for three main routes, five side routes, eight feeding routes, three cross-routes, and one grand circle route—Mulhouse, Luxemburg, Aix-la-Chapelle, Wilhelmshafen, Kiel, Stralsund, Danzig, Memel, Cracow, Czernovitz, Brasso, Fiume, Trieste, Innsbruck, Zurich, Mulhouse. The main routes are: (1) Hamburg, Berlin, Vienna; (2) Strassburg, Karlsruhe, Stuttgart, Munich, Vienna; and (3) Berlin, Dresden, Prague, and Vienna. After Vienna all three run via Budapest to Constantinople.

'The five side routes all run to Berlin, and the eight feeders to various pick-up stations on the main routes. The scheme provides for stopping stations about every

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150 miles, and an average speed of about 60 miles an hour.

‘The service will be carried out largely by Zeppelins discharged from military and naval service after the war.’<sup>1</sup>

Almost on top of this comes the news—via Geneva—that a German commission will shortly be appointed to report on ‘the apparent supremacy of the enemy’s aerial fleet over German aviators.’

At the same time a gigantic meeting was held in Berlin, the principal speaker at which meeting was Major Siegertm, inspector of the war flying forces. In a strikingly optimistic *résumé* he depicted the German Air Service as ‘masters of the air, over land and over sea.’ Withal the mastery gained by humane pilots, who ‘with touching piety notify the enemy when one of his airmen is shot down, drop a parachute with the fallen enemy’s personal effects over his own lines, and, if possible, send a photograph of his last resting-place to his bereaved family.’

‘Though undoubtedly daring and extraordinary tenacious,’ he said, ‘the English have grown so rowdyish through sport that they are not filled with any sense of the terribly deep meaning of war. They look

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upon it merely as a thrilling change from football or boxing.'

To this he adds a brief summary of the wonderful development of flying during the war.

'In 1914 our airmen could carry, comfortably, three bombs in each of their two pockets. To-day they drop bombs the size of torpedoes. In 1914 they travelled with 80 to 100 h.p. engines. To-day they can fly three times faster than the swiftest express train. The tricks of Pégoud, which in 1914 made the world hold its breath, are now everyday feats.

'Our air reconnaissance on the western front,' he concluded, 'comprehends two zones—the first extends to a line level with the positions of the enemy's long-range naval guns; the second is limited to the western and north-western coasts of France. The duty of our airmen in the second zone is especially to watch railway traffic, the transfer of troops, and the setting up or removal of camps. For the purpose of detailed observation the enemy's country is divided up into long, narrow, handkerchief-like areas, and a division of airmen is assigned to each one of these.'

## Some Curious Adventures





## CHAPTER XIV

### Some Curious Adventures

**W**ILLIAM, it appears, is a name essentially antagonistic to England and the English. Back in the stormy days of the early Middle Ages came one William with fire and sword from Burgundy, pillaging and ravaging the fair South lands, and putting to the sword all such as crossed his way—and will. To satiate his mortal vanity, a thousand streams of red blood ran down the slopes at Hastings, and flames of fire licked up and swept away a glorious Abbey.

More peaceful was the coming of the second William. His was by far the humbler spirit. For, came he not in anxious humility from a palatine border state; a minor prince of Orange who was afterwards to lead the fortunes and destinies of the greatest Empire of all time, to which throne he succeeded with a bloodless revolution, and never as much as a by your leave.

But the third William, brooding thickly over disastrous defeats ashore and afloat, comes sneaking over in the dread darkness,

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and, like a common thief, 'breaks his crib,' and is away again for dear life. The mark of the cloven hoof is upon him. The mark of the cloven hoof is upon the burnt and shattered houses, the poor maimed bodies, the terrified babes and women, but not upon the dauntless spirit of the nation that lies at his mercy beneath his murderous bombs. But only for a time—and then——

The frail grey planes that climb and crawl across the Flanders battlefield and patrol the mighty seas are working out the destiny of this super-criminal. When his day comes he will be on his knees whining and grovelling. Then will come the thunderous roar of the giant cavalcade of his innocent victims across the Great Beyond. Justice will be dead that day, and Mercy sleeping the sleep of the just.

Meanwhile, those former Williams rest stately and dignified in their marble tombs in the stately Abbey. And while the other William's aircraft speed noisily above the great city's head, and workmen are busy piling sandbags upon the tomb of one of the Williams for protection, a curious discovery has been made. Dropped in the coffin lid lay an unopened letter. There it

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had lain undisturbed for more than two hundred years.

It originated from one William West—another William who, for his pains, was barber of Westminster School, and received in honorarium thereof forty shillings a year, with an additional twenty for keeping the clock. And the address bore the sign of the Crown at Bridgnorth, Shropshire, to Charles Hart, and the letter reads itself:—

‘Dear frend,—I make bould to trouble you with These few Lines to satisfy you I am In good health; Living in hopes to see you once: in London. . . . So that I should be very g..d: yr Frend William Cole remembers His Love to you being my Cheaf Companyion at the tombs so That I here your in good health wich is the most of my satisfaction, desiring to here from you, and if you can conveniently to send a Cock for a token against Shafersburg will drink your health and eat him for your Saek no more at present. But i rest your Loveing frend,

‘WILLIAM WEST.’

Cock fighting may have been some enticement in Mr. William's days, but one fears that it would stand but short shrift with the

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hysterical excitements and amusements of the twentieth century. At sight of those ravaging aeroplanes over his head, Honest Will would doubtless have dropt hastily upon his knees, and crossed himself piously, begging his Creator to spare him from these devils' inventions.

And, *en passant*, another incident savouring of the past. A bomb from an aircraft, in a recent raid, fell upon and demolished a religious literature establishment. Although almost every article in the shop was smashed to smithereens, there remained hanging on the wall the following text-card:

'St Matthew xxiv., verse 6:—And ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars; see that ye be not troubled, for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet.'

But to-day the aeroplanes hold sway over land and sea, city and meadow, man and beast alike. And their manners and customs compare as well as the British Tank with Cæsar's body-shield.

From the *Daily Mail*: 'One of the naval squadrons co-operating with the Army that Flies along the front has a foolscap manuscript notebook bearing the superscription "Notes on Aerial Fighting." The youthful

## Some Curious Adventures

author will never handle either pen or "joystick" (control lever) again. His notebook has been edited and printed. But to be appreciated it should be read in the original round, rather boyish handwriting, within hearing of the continuous sound of the British guns, and the drone of a scouting fighter.

'It contains ten commandments, which need not be recapitulated here. But the introduction epitomises the spirit of them all.'

The man who gets most Huns in his lifetime is the man who observes these commandments and fights with his head. The others either get killed or get nerves in a very short time, and the country does not get the full benefit of having trained them.'

'The commandments conclude with the following exhortation: "A very pleasant [*sic*] help in time of trouble is to put yourself in the enemy's place, and view the situation from his point of view. If you feel frightened before an attack, just think how frightened he must be!"'

Whether or no strictly in accordance with the forementioned code, this following feat cannot reasonably be recommended to nervous or timorous mortals.

## Glorious Exploits of the Air

After five times 'looping the loop' at an aerodrome, Somewhere in Somewhere, the other day, and from an altitude of somewhere in the region of one thousand feet, the pilot thought it was time to give variety to his exhibition, and promptly repeated the performance, sideways. Wing over wing he went, faster and faster, like a giant wind-mill, down to one hundred and fifty feet, where he gracefully slithered into a horizontal attitude, and concluded with a more graceful landing.

These 'stunts' do not conduce to safety. Rather the reverse, as a brother airman discovered to his cost after diving sheer three thousand five hundred feet in an uncontrollable aeroplane. The mishap started with the control levers becoming jammed in the middle of a 'loop.' He attempted to break his fall by pulling into two trees, and though the machine was smashed to atoms, he still lived.

Flying crashes have also their humorous side. An aeroplane, carrying a pilot and observer, made a false landing in a field, unfortunately colliding with a tree in the process. Result—a bad smash. Philosophers both, they sat upon the shattered remnants; around them gathered the spectators, wide-mouthed. After the pilot—in reply to the

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query of a kindly-natured old woman as to whether there had been an accident—had assured her that the manœuvre had been performed solely for amusement, it was noticed that the observer had broken a leg. It flapped idly to and fro, but there sat the gallant youth smoking a cigarette, and jesting with his companion as though the maiming of a limb were an everyday occurrence. Eventually it transpired that the mutilated leg was not of the uniform pattern, but had been made to order, somewhere in the region of the Haymarket—of wood!

And again: a gentleman of mature years, who, from no choice of his own, is always to be found in green coat with pantaloons to match.

The rumour of a raid was in the air. And, suddenly, the crashing of anti-aircraft guns and falling bombs re-echoed through the city. But our friend was in no way dismayed. A severe eye he turned upon the door, and said simply, 'Come in!'

Panic-stricken chambermaids and waiters were forced to smile, and, smiling, forgot their fright, which made our mutual friend all the more pleased with himself. But, an end to this riddle: M. Poll Parrot is familiar to every visitor to that ancient hostel



## Glorious Exploits of the Air

burrowed in a tiny court behind the shady side of Fleet Street—the 'Cheshire Cheese.'

With regret, to return to the sterner realities of war—stern in more senses than one, for it reveals the story of an amazing fight to the death in mid-air between an enemy pilot and his observer.

His radiator being shattered by a British anti-aircraft shell, the former began to plane gradually down towards his own lines, when he was surprised to find himself being shaken violently by the shoulder. Turning, he faced his angered observer's face, and a hurriedly-scrawled note was thrust into his hand. The missive ordered him to descend to the ground immediately, so that he, the observer, might receive urgent medical attention.

The pilot shook his head, indicating that it was his duty, if possible, to prevent the machine from falling into our hands. Forthwith the observer clutched him by the throat, and did his best to strangle him.

The fight waxed furious. 'I felt his fingers,' said the pilot afterwards, 'tightening on my throat. It was his life or mine, so I fought him. The situation was critical. There wasn't a moment to lose, for the machine was descending rapidly.'

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' Seizing the lieutenant round the waist I pulled him towards me, and, aided by the inclination of the machine, lifted him and threw him overboard. Then I seized the levers and tried to right the aeroplane.

' I was only six hundred feet up. Closing my eyes I waited the inevitable crash. But the machine landed in a wood, and the trees saved me.'

Another pilot—an Englishman—returning from patrol, sighted what he believed a bombing party of our craft returning home. He flew up to escort them, but to his astonishment discovered ten enemy machines. Immediately one of them attacked. He brought her down to disappear within their lines. Then, with wonderful daring, he attacked the remainder. Five of them opened fire from long range. Despite this he drew close, and sent two more to the ground. The others made off, and he gave chase. Drawing nearer, a bullet took him in the thigh. For a moment he fainted and lost control of his machine. Recovering himself, he resumed the chase, until all his ammunition was spent. And eventually, by a miracle of good luck, he landed just within our lines.

For the rest, another scene enacted somewhere in the war area. The tiny, distant

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form of an aeroplane climbs skywards from a base behind the British lines. Set this figure in a background that moves gently across a patch of clear blue sky, and over a battle-scarred and trench-enfiladed earth, with the sun sinking below the horizon, and you have the picture I have in mind. The course of the machine, as one may judge from the ground, is direct; the object of the flight, reconnaissance. As it draws near the lines a similar shape is seen to rise over the enemy country. Is it to give battle? The pilot of our machine has also observed the advent of the daring stranger, and speeds forward. There follows an exhilarating chase. Our machine draws level. The guns flash at either prow. Then the enemy turns for home, our man in hot pursuit. They sink lower, further and further out of view. There is a violent cannonade from some point on the ground. The shells burst incessantly, flame-grey patches surround the uppermost machine. He has been led over a rocket-battery. Downward he dives and gets in at close range. The observer puts another round into the enemy's back. His machine shudders visibly, then, with an unsteady, swinging motion sinks earthwards. He dives through a cloud. The British craft follows suit. The firing

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reopens. Again the enemy is hit, this time beyond recovery. With a nerve-racking bump he lands in a ploughed field, our machine barely three hundred feet above. Out of the fallen machine scramble pilot and observer, and stumble hurriedly across the fields, the one aiding the other, who is apparently wounded. Then a party of soldiers in the vicinity open fire with their rifles. In spite of this the British machine turns again, and letting fall an incendiary bomb, leaves the German wreathed in smoke and flames. Continuing westward, he climbs rapidly to clear their lines. But, by the time of reaching them, he is still only two thousand feet. To cross at such an altitude would mean certain death. There is an alternative, but he must be a cool and resourceful pilot who dares that. He dives steeply, getting up an enormous speed, and with great coolness lands behind a wood, five hundred yards within our lines, his machine riddled with holes. Then, calmly collecting their gear, pilot and observer make off to the nearest headquarters to report.

These modern knights ride their petrol steeds, with their gun lances atilt their shoulders, in the lists of the clouds and boundless eternity, with a smiling Queen of Victory

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awaiting their victorious return below. Her name is no commonplace feminine equivalent, but the proud cognomen—Duty.

Of these graceful duels, one cannot forbear to mention the affair of Rouzier Dorcieres, a personality famous in two continents, a composite of Cyrano de Bergerac and d'Artagnan. Dorcieres was *premier* duellist of the great Republic across the Channel. More than a score of victorious duels could he claim, but the greatest was in the clouds, the last, fought not for self-glory, but for the honour of his beloved France.

Wherever Dorcieres travelled, his reputation preceded him. At Zurich, in 1910, he was publicly insulted by an officer of the Prussian Guards. The latter approached him after dinner, as Dorcieres was sipping his coffee in the lounge.

‘So you are Rouzier Dorcieres,’ he said, sneeringly. ‘I recognise you, and they say you have never been touched in a duel. Well, I am sorry I have never had the good fortune to meet you in one.’

‘But you will have the chance to meet me,’ replied Dorcieres heatedly.

The Prussian’s expression grew dark. ‘Monsieur,’ he said, ‘I shall meet you here before 10 o’clock with my seconds and the

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swords. We will settle this affair before I depart. Will you await me?’

The duellist waited, but no Prussian appeared. He had departed hurriedly. And from that evening he registered a mental vow to obtain satisfaction from his cowardly assailant, somewhere, sometime, somehow.

With this object he enlisted in the French Air Service on the outbreak of war. Said his pilot of Rouzier Dorcieres:

‘He was the strangest machine gunner I ever had. Unlike other gunners, he always carried binoculars, and when we sighted and approached a Boche he spent his time in peering intently at the occupants of the enemy machine instead of preparing his *mitrailleuse*, anxiously, as most gunners do.

‘As we circled near the German machine in his last fight Dorcieres passed me a scrap of paper. On it he had scrawled a request that I swoop past the German as near as I could. Instantly I divined his reason—and his reason for always carrying and using his high-power glasses. He thought he recognised one of the occupants of the other aeroplane.

‘Our fusilage cracked and splintered as the leaden hail perforated the car, and the choking gasps that I heard behind me were

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the positive indications that my gunner had been hit. I turned upward, as my motor was undamaged, and climbed with the German. Then we both planed and approached each other, and the test was which of the two machine gunners would prove to be the better man.

‘Dorcieres’ first shot at the new elevation must have killed the enemy gunner. And his torrent of bullets ripped off the tail of the Fokker as it dived into our lines like a stone, nose down.

‘I piqued down, too, and landed within fifty yards of the broken Boche car and its occupants. Two stretchers were waiting there for us, but I was unhurt, miraculously. We put Dorcieres in one, tenderly as a baby, and then started off. But he had seen the wreck of the Fokker there, and he begged that we stop beside it.

‘Beside the German machine were the pilot and the gunner, both dead. By a superhuman effort my dying gunner raised himself on his elbow. He gazed at the battered dead face of the enemy machine gunner.

‘“It is he,” was all he said. And we carried him to the field hospital.’

## **With the Planes in a 'Push'**





## CHAPTER XV

### With the Planes in a 'Push'

**G**UNS, grenades, armoured cars, infantry, cavalry, tanks: all go to make a great victory, or, to be more correct, now, a 'big push.' The aeroplane is more essential than any. The giant animal remorselessly pounding its way forward, through hedge and field, brick and mortar, blood and steel, rolls backward and forward, to and fro like a drunken man, without a knowledge of what lies before it. Here a tentacle of infantry creeps forward, behind hedged fields and ruined masonry, to meet with disaster from an ambush of machine-guns. There a mile-long front lies idle because the enemy have withdrawn long since without our knowledge. Without eyes the beast of war is helpless and useless. The eyes of the Army are in the air, where the gallant pilots of the R.F.C. fly to and fro across the lines, reconnaissance bound, photographing, directing the fire of the guns, and driving off enemy craft from spying on our positions in similar manner.

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Immediately prior to the battle is the busy time in the air. The sky is a-whirr with craft. High in the clouds hang the powerful and speedy battleplanes, ready to swoop down at an instant's notice to aid the slower and more cumbrous reconnaissance and photographic craft, duty bound to considerably lower altitudes.

The first business of the Air services, when a big attack is contemplated, is to fly over the surrounding districts, observing the positions of the enemy troops, artillery emplacements, and lines of trenches and supports; to note the condition of the roadways and railways leading to the lines, also any unusual activity, and supply this information to the staff who are planning out the manœuvre far behind our own lines.

For a day or so the observation craft are kept busy. And no pleasant amusement is it to keep across shrapnel and high-explosive barrage at the low altitude necessary for accurate reconnaissance. There is an enduring and not-to-be-wondered-at enmity between the British pilots and the enemy anti-aircraft gunners. Nothing is more irritating, or, for that matter, alarming, than an incessant 'hide and seek' with bursting 'Archies,' and

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the side-stepping of heavy shells with high altitude trajectories.

The very 'wouf! wouf!' of the reports and the scrunching, screaming passage into the air jar the nerves immeasurably. All through the day and far into the night they are hard at it barking and spitting, and bringing craft hurling to the ground.

Wholesomely exasperated by a certain battery behind the enemy front line—who, by the way, were so pleasantly inaccurate as to annoy no one—a British squadron set out one fine summer's morning annihilation bent. Down to within five hundred feet they swept, and before the enraged gunners had space to recover themselves had left behind a mass of battered metal, shrapnel pitted earth, and filleted Hun.

The variety of existence popularly endowed upon a cat is seven. That of the airman must be seven times seven—and then some! The risks he must take are out of all proportion of safety. Sent out to remove offensive 'Sausages,' another R.F.C. pilot, with six already to his bag—that had descended wreathed in smoke and flame—observed another 'bagged down' upon the ground. With a daring sweep he descended

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through a fusillade of shrapnel and shell to within five hundred feet, and bombed! The balloon immediately burst into flame, and before the outraged guard or their attendant 'Archies' could effectively intervene he had made off.

The necessary reconnaissance accomplished, the photographers get busy. Up and down the lines they creep through an incessant bombardment. A camera is fixed into the base of the fusilage, and the entire district is taken field by field and sector by sector.

No more wonderful negatives have been obtained than those over the Flanders' battlefield. The surface of the earth is divided off into squares, and the photographer's results are then compared with similar portions of the ordnance maps, making an exceedingly accurate and thoroughly reliable survey. Where the map is cold and lifeless, the photograph gives a natural live touch to the panorama.

Day by day a careful comparison is made of negatives of the same sector. It is wonderful to watch the way they have developed. Where a few days previously there ran a tiny scratch across a grey-black field, within three days it is replaced by a sharply-lined mark,

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and a week's observation discloses—to the initiated—a fresh gun emplacement. Other markings are there to be found, puzzling as a Chinese grammar; but the staff knows, and the Hun knows that they know, from the frail craft circling round overhead. Based upon this knowledge, together with the information gleaned from the reconnaissance reports, the artillery bombardment starts off. Up go the observation planes to 'sit' over the targets, and wireless back the position of the shell-burst to the guns.

Up in the clouds meanwhile, two miles above—surely the world's record—a desperate battle is being fought out between a British pilot—who has brought down more enemy machines than he has seen summers—and a Hun Albatross.

Slightly behind the German lines, and himself single-handed, he sighted two aeroplanes, escorted by two Albatrosses, heading for our lines. He did not choose to give immediate battle, for fear, against their overwhelming odds, he might be wounded and forced to land in German occupied territory.

So he followed them, shadowing them from above the clouds. They climbed steadily higher. He hung close to their tails,

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in order to deceive the German anti-aircraft gunners, who would thus believe him to be forming part of their escort.

Mile after mile flew past in this fashion. Then, when the lines were reached, he dived out of the clouds and commenced the fight. An observation plane was the nearest to him, and, hung up there two miles between earth and sky, he opened fire with his machine-gun.

With his third shot he killed the observer. With the tenth the pilot was shot bolt out of his machine dead, and the machine commenced whirling down towards our lines.

This was the second machine he had brought down that day, but immediately he turned back after the remaining three, to find that they had made off at his first shot.

So the carnage grows; night and day the big guns roar on the ground below. Dawn and sunset, like hounds let out of leash, their watch-dogs go winging into the skies—and the moral? That is writ broad in the half light hours of the dawn preceding the advance.

One danger-despising youngster, in the midst of the hard-fought infantry battle, had the control wires of his machine severed by

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a piece of bursting shrapnel. Down she dived, head foremost, apparently beyond control.

Below were the enemy lines, when, with the machine already within a hundred yards of the ground, the observer scrambled dangerously from his seat and hoisted himself up on to the upper plane of the machine. Then, after a highly perilous climb, and clinging tightly to the canvas, he restored the balance of the aeroplane by working the plane by hand.

Fortunately the engine still held good, and with the restored equilibrium they were able to make the Allied lines without further mishap.

Alternately the aeroplanes play hawk and owl. Half the night they can be heard feeling their way enemywards. Their daylight hours are occupied in bombing trains and railway centres and silencing machine and anti-aircraft guns. In the interval they turn their attention to the traffic on the roads, and the rivers, and the railways.

One pilot, setting out with a full load of bombs and ammunition, found his supply eventually reduced to a Very's pistol. He went on with it.



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When the Flying Services begin to get busy, the air, to the enemy airmen, becomes the most unhealthy place imaginable. German planes are conspicuous by their absence.

The reason is not far to seek. One R.F.C. pilot, bored bad with the idle superficialities of this life, spent a solid three hours 'sitting' in the clouds over an enemy aerodrome, sending his pilots down again one by one as they showed up against the sky-line. Then, by way of recreation, and with a twenty minutes' supply of petrol in his tanks, slithered down and successfully engaged three entire batteries of anti-aircraft guns.

Observation craft on these days find plenty to fill their time. Information is to hand concerning one solitary squadron that on one solitary day were instrumental in silencing seventy-two enemy batteries (288 guns).

And one of our youthful veterans condescended to report 'that the enemy's infantry were much demoralised and left the line of march.'

But meanwhile, what of the infantry battle that is, by this time, raging below? At Vimy Ridge and at Messines we are told that 'never before have the enemy airmen been so bullied into taking the offensive.'

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Immediately prior to the battle both 'traveling circuses'—of crack pilots, flying scarlet aeroplanes—were hurriedly ordered up to the lines. Then they commenced their campaign of destruction, by imitating our own Air Services, in continually diving down upon the crowded trenches, and raking them with machine-gun fire.

Another day their operations were confined solely to an attack upon our captive balloons, amply replenishing the numbers of their own craft of this particular type, so that as many as thirteen were counted in the area of two square miles of air at the same time, while their photographers were inordinately active over the Ridge, taking many undue risks, and thus losing an unprofitable percentage of craft.

And scraping across the roofs hurtled long-range, high-velocity shells, with more enemy aircraft than had ever been seen assembled in one particular spot during the course of the war. For the time being things looked very unpleasant for our people. Then our fighting triplanes appeared upon the scene, and conditions were immediately reversed.

The dawn of the Advance! The grey

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light sweeps into the sky. A battleplane, a small black smudge, creeps up from the far horizon. The air is full of the clamour of bursting shells. Clouds of smoke trail skyward from various points, shrouding the sun. Shell-burst is answered with shell-burst. Now there is a violent action on the left. The country, the roadways, the railways, 'immediately behind,' are alive with men and horses, guns and cars, transports and tanks.

Creeping homeward at between three and four thousand feet, wing a squadron of British raiding machines. From each tail winks a tiny light across the sky. Through the long and trying night these craft, by fours and sixes, have been racing to and fro to the east.

Before the light is really in the sky, our kite-balloons are going up in twos and threes. To this nightmare of strangeness they add their quota, and by emitting curious signals, give the impression that the balloon is on fire.

Now three raiding aeroplanes that have just crept into roost report that: 'Across the ridge there, where the British shells are bursting in a murderous hail, it must be untenable to any human being.' And that

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the enemy in a last desperate attempt sent up a squadron of between fifteen and twenty machines to drive off six daring Britishers. The battle was fierce, sharp, and deadly earnest. We lost our formation at the first onset. But that was only to be expected in the face of such overwhelming odds. Then our machines worked in pairs.

One German plane came hurtling down within our lines. Two others were seen to crash in the enemy's country. For some ten minutes the spectators in the trenches waited for more, in agonised suspense, their eyes glued to that wheeling, battling *mêlée*. Then two more enemy machines came diving down, and the remainder made off. Of our six no one was missing, but they were terribly shot about.

Meanwhile, the solitary battleplane, high up against the multi-grey sky, crosses the lines. There it is bombarded heavily on all sides by 'Archies' that burst now below, now immediately in front, now above, now immediately behind its nose and tail.

The battle breaks with awesome fury. Similar swiftly moving shapes creep up from behind the British lines. The eyes of the Army sweep the earth to the furthest division

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and the remotest gun. From trench to trench sweeps the hand-to-hand combat in the open. The artillery duel is likened to a great game of ping-pong. Now the enemy fires, and the shell bursts well behind our lines. Almost immediately, as though by return service, ours goes flashing back too; there is the feverish rush of reinforcements and supports.

All this, and more, the prying eyes of the trained observer takes in and transmits again, by way of a sizzling wireless key, to the staff, who *must* have that particular piece of information.

More wooded is the enemy country than ours, and more broken. Here and there are dotted small and straggling villages; all are a mass of ruins. A ruined factory chimney rears itself gaunt, like a giant sentinel, against the sky. It stands cold and drear. The thick black smoke belches from the mouth no more. That is a thing of the past. South by east, and in rear immediately of another small village, is a straggling grave-yard.

Almost next door to it, the gaunt frame of a shattered windmill. To west and north more villages, more roads, more railways, more ruin, more misery!

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Suddenly the shell-swept, barren 'No Man's Land' is alive with hurrying, ant-like figures. See how they come swarming over the enemy trenches. The observer watches the British lines with wildly beating heart. What are they going to do?

Below the enemy reserves are suddenly shrouded with dense clouds of blinding smoke. This is an old dodge on the part of Herr Enemy. Encircling his troops at close distance are stationed a series of gigantic smoke stoves. Immediately it is suspected that a British airman is overhead, or that the flash of a gun may be observed, these stoves are set off in columns of smoke.

Then our troops receive the enemy charge. Long since the bark and boom of the light and heavy guns, far in the rear, have died away. Now it is a matter of hand to hand, man to man. With a shout and a roar they are over the top. It is a fleeting glimpse of Dante's Inferno. The lines meet and sway like the waves of the sea. Within half an hour it is all over. The enemy have been beaten back. We are in possession of an additional half mile of his trenches.

And, after another fight, the solitary battleplane turns for the home aerodrome,

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the pilot, in his official report, condescending to say: 'During the fight I saw two other enemy planes spin down. Then, having lost sight of all other machines, and being only two hundred feet from the ground, I decided to fly home at that height. A company of German cavalry going along a small road halted and fired, and several machine guns opened fire. After flying west for about five minutes, I was again attacked by another type of enemy's machine. We manœuvred against one another for some while, until within about five minutes of crossing the line, flying against a strong wind.

'When he was about 150 yards behind me I looped straight over him and, coming out of loop, dived and fired a good burst, hitting pilot mortally in the back. He at once dived straight into the ground. I then landed at the first aerodrome I saw. My machine was badly shot about.'

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## CHAPTER XVI

### ‘The Invincibles’

‘**O**NE lieutenant was hit in seven places, and his companion also was struck by shrapnel, but their machine was landed safely in our lines after completing the work it was sent to do.’

The latter phrase particularly compels one’s attention. ‘After completing the work it was sent to do.’ The writer—perhaps unconsciously—paid thus the greatest tribute possible to this daring hero. The sentiment is so peculiarly British, so altogether typical of our Flying Services.

A proud boast it is of theirs, that they do not advertise. And who of us is there to challenge this attitude? But at least we may be allowed to pay a humble tribute to duty so bravely done.

With shattered thigh and lacerated side, a boy pilot on the Western front flew on another forty miles, when he could well have turned for home. With his eyes blinded with agony, the machine rocking wildly in his shaking grasp, he completed his recon-

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naissance. Then his machine dived, uncontrolled, to the earth. The poor maimed body was almost unrecognisable. The patrol report was found, completed to the last moment. But the daring spirit lives on. It is the birthright of this our latest born Service. It is a birthright valued beyond all human dreams of avarice. It was dearly bought in human flesh and blood.

This birthright it was that gained for the father of a dead hero the glowing letter from his Commanding Officer which appeared recently in the *Streatham News*:

‘DEAR MR. YOUNG,—It is with the deepest regret and sympathy that I have to write and inform you of your son’s death, which took place on Saturday, during the enemy aircraft attack on this country.

‘Your son, as you know, had only been in my squadron for a short time, but quite long enough for me to realise what a very efficient and gallant officer he was, and what a tremendous loss he is to me. He had absolutely the heart of a lion, and was a very good pilot.

‘Your son has been up on every raid of late, and has always managed to get in



A V.C. OF THE AIR.

This drawing illustrates the deed which won the Victoria Cross for Sec.-Lieut. Gilbert Insall, R.F.C. Having brought down a German machine he saw the Germans scramble out and prepare to fire. He dived to 500 feet, thus enabling his gunner, 1st A.M. Donald, to open heavy fire on them. Lieut. Insall then dropped an incendiary bomb on the enemy machine, which was last seen wreathed in smoke.



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contact with enemy machines. The last raid, which, unfortunately, resulted in his death, shows what a very gallant officer we have lost.

‘Almost single-handed he flew straight into the middle of twenty-two machines, and both himself and his observer at once opened fire. All the enemy machines opened fire also, so he was horribly outnumbered. The volume of fire to which he was subjected was too awful for words.

‘To give you a rough idea. There were twenty-two machines, each machine had four guns; each gun was firing about 400 rounds per minute. Your son never hesitated in the slightest. He flew straight on until, as I should imagine, he must have been riddled with bullets. The machine then put its nose right up into the air and fell over, and went spinning down into the sea from 14,000 feet. I, unfortunately, had to witness the whole ghastly affair.

‘The machine sank so quickly that it was, I regret, impossible to save your son’s body, he was so badly entangled in the wires, &c. H.M.S. — rushed to the spot as soon as possible, but only arrived in time to pick up your son’s observer, who, I regret to

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state, is also dead. He was wounded six times, and had a double fracture in the skull.

‘I cannot speak too highly of the magnificent behaviour of your son; all that I can say is that he was a most gallant officer, and that I am proud to think that he was in my command.

‘I hope that you and your family will accept my sincerest sympathy, and also the sympathy of all his brother officers, in your great loss.

‘Yours sincerely,

‘MAJOR ——.’

Almost at the same period a brother officer distinguished himself by ‘putting out’ a pilot on fire in the air. When the machine took fire he stood up in his seat, and sprayed his pilot with a fire extinguisher, thereby enabling him to regain control and land the machine.

Five British machines fought and dispersed twenty-seven enemy craft, and this is the story of it:

From Y—— they rode a compact, well-ordered little squadron, veering neither to the left nor to the right for enemy craft or shell.

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A dense haze hung over the ground like a pall, shrouding all landmarks from above an altitude of 2000 feet. Towards five o'clock they encountered two enemy craft, and this—as is so often the case with aerial combats—was but the prelude to the main battle.

From all corners of the enemy territory came speeding powerful reinforcements. Soon our tiny squadron found themselves surrounded on all sides. The two original machines had been but decoys. Now they had to hew their way out of an encircling ring of steel.

Up and down the ladders of heaven the battle raged. For a full desperate hour they were hard at it, fighting for dear life. But a few moments sufficed for us to draw first blood. Captain X——, with a superb dive, had sent diving an enemy, in flames, to the earth.

Now the tide of battle surged to Lieut. Y——. With a similar dive, he was not long in piling up a second enemy craft. The hat trick went to Captain M——. He did not sight the actual wreck of his opponent's machine, but he saw her slithering and diving helplessly through the line of haze.

Then Captain X——'s engine started



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playing tricks, and down he sank from the formation. It was a terrifying drop, and none the less so for a hovering enemy that immediately dived for him, imagining him helpless.

But assistance was not long in coming. Captain M——, who had, in a lapse of the battle, caught sight of his comrade's mishap, dived down to his aid. And the revengeful hawk became the prey of a better man.

The battle was now drawing to a close. The enemy formation was weakening yard by yard. Further and further east merged the battling planes, when, with a desperate spurt, Lieut. Y—— dived head-on into the middle of them. No power in heaven or air could resist such an onslaught.

The leading German machine—that occupied the proud position in the centre of the pack—turned turtle. Clean over her back she went, and in a dense wreath of smoke and flame dived to earth.

Then the enemy broke. One by one the outer machines turned and fled, with, very soon, the main body hard at their heels.

But it is the hardest matter in the world to disengage from a losing fight. Before the enemy could disentangle himself,

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two more winged craft had dived from the pack. Then our tiny squadron, rigid and compact, turned for home, serene and happy.

Thus, then, the reader will be inclined to think that the aerial fighter works in packs. However, this is far from being the case. He is, more often than not, a specialist, always an individualist, certainly an opportunist. The great aerial fighter inherits the gift—if such condition were possible. Certain it is, though, that he must be born with the fighting instinct; he can rarely cultivate it.

Every great battle airman of the war has an original theory of attack. He would not be a great battle airman otherwise. Boelke, gallant enemy, and second of this daring band, explained his theory of aerial combat to a journalist as follows:

‘It has been said that German airmen never fly over hostile lines, and that they always remain over territory occupied by their own troops. As regards chasing machines that is true; but it should be remembered, firstly, that our new machines have some features which we ought to keep to ourselves; and, secondly, that our object is only to prevent hostile aeroplanes from carrying out their observations. It is for

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these reasons that we prefer to wait for them where we expect to meet them.'

Of other great airmen, Captain Guynemer is one of the best known to the public. It is said of him that 'if he wants to win another decoration or order, he will have to have it made for him.' But decorations are poor appreciation of the work he has accomplished. And of these decorations an excellent anecdote is to hand. How, one day, when he was surrounded by gushing women, who demanded: 'You have now the Legion of Honour, the Military Medal, and the War Cross—why, what other decoration can you win yet?' Guynemer replied immediately, 'Oh! The Wooden Cross!'

Of English descent—his paternal grandmother was a woman of Kent, and his father was educated at Westminster—a wiry youth, modest and reserved of character, he is so frail of physique that already he had been five times rejected before he succeeded in joining the French Air Service in the spring of 1915.

On July 19 of that year occurred Guynemer's first fight in the air. Over Soissons, and in a two-seater, with a machine gunner on board, he came up with a German aeroplane.

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The flight lasted for just ten minutes. But those few minutes sufficed to show that the daring and initiative of the young pilot premised a great future for him in the world of aviation. Needless to say, he succeeded in bringing his opponent down, and of all the hundred odd fights in which he has participated since those early days, never once has he been unsuccessful.

Once, and once only, has he had a narrow escape from defeat. That occurred some eighteen months ago. He had just exchanged his famous plane ‘Old Charlie’ for a new and faster craft. With this he attacked two German aeroplanes, and, for once, he blundered.

On his approach they made off, and he gave chase. Rising, he shot the leading machine down, and swooped for the second. That was his black moment. He had woe-fully miscalculated the speed of his new machine, and shot ahead of the enemy. Instantly his machine was riddled with bullets. One of them hit the engine casing, and two of the resulting splinters pierced Guynemer’s arm, sending him to hospital for two months.

‘I will make the Boches pay for keeping me inactive,’ he said, as he lay on his bed.

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And how well and truly he has kept his promise may be judged by reference to the French Official Reports.

French, British, Belgian, one and all have made history such that none of either country could heretofore rival. And an Australian squadron patrolling over the arid wastes of Sinai proved that they also had excellent reasons to be included in this glorious brotherhood.

One airman performed a most gallant feat. He flew back some eighty miles, in order to pick up a comrade who had been compelled to descend owing to engine trouble, and succeeded in bringing him back in safety despite the fire of the enemy.

Again from official documents placed at his disposal a French correspondent takes the following incident:

A couple of British airmen, after a reconnaissance fifty miles behind the enemy lines on the Somme, were on the way back, when they spotted a German monoplane ahead. They gave chase, exchanging rapid shots, and eventually the adversary, seeing that he had no chance of getting away, made a hurried spiral descent and landed.

The British pilot and his companion

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hovered overhead for a few minutes lest the Hun should try to make off. But the monoplane remained motionless, and the airman did not get out of his machine.

As the country was desolate and deserted the Englishmen decided to go down to investigate. Approaching the German, they shouted ‘Hands up!’ There was no reply. He was dead. A machine-gun bullet had cut an artery and left him just enough strength to reach the ground. His machine was intact, so, after removing the body, one of the pilots got into it, and, with his fellow-officer piloting the other machine, returned home.

Everything went well until the German aeroplane was seen over our lines, but it fortunately passed safely through the shrapnel which greeted it and landed without injury.

Even more daring was the case of a British observer engaged on artillery patrol work. Six hostile aeroplanes suddenly surrounded his craft, one of them diving on him from above. He opened fire, and the enemy went down.

Then his own machine got out of control. Believing his pilot to have been either killed or wounded, he climbed from his seat and made his way across the wing to the uncon-

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scious pilot. There, sitting on the wounded man's lap, and with his left foot resting on the wing, he 'straightened' her out, and selecting a large field near by, landed safely.

And what can one say of the late Sergeant Thomas Mottershead, V.C., whose great deed was told in a supplement of the *London Gazette*? He was awarded his V.C.:

'For most conspicuous bravery, endurance, and skill when attacked at an altitude of 9000 feet, the petrol tank was pierced and the machine set on fire.

'Enveloped in flames, which his observer, Lieutenant Gower, was unable to subdue, this very gallant soldier succeeded in bringing his aeroplane back to our lines, and, though he made a successful landing, the machine collapsed on touching the ground, pinning him beneath the wreckage, from which he was subsequently rescued.

'Though suffering extreme torture from burns, Sergeant Mottershead showed the most conspicuous presence of mind in the careful selection of a landing-place, and his wonderful endurance and fortitude undoubtedly saved the life of his observer.

'He has since succumbed to his injuries.'

But the greatest of them all was Captain

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Albert Ball. His achievements included the winning of a V.C., D.S.O., and M.C. Only a mere boy, he was the terror of the enemy Air Services, who, strange to say, also appreciated his extreme value as a pilot. Nottingham might well be proud of this the greatest of her sons.

Only twenty years of age, Captain Ball was the ideal airman; big-hearted, generous, with always a word of praise for others, friend or foe, he was popular wherever or with whoever he came in contact. He was credited with having brought down no fewer than forty-three enemy aeroplanes and one captive balloon, though, if the real truth were known, this number would be almost doubled.

He was the ‘Scarlet Pimpernel’ of the air, waiting always over cloud and mist above the enemy aerodromes. Somewhere below, British craft would be attacked in overwhelming numbers. With a mighty dive, he would swoop down on top of them, putting the terrified enemy to flight, for they knew his presence from his craft and method of handling it.

Fame first came to him when escorting a bombing raid. On the return journey they



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encountered four enemy battleplanes in formation. His was the only fighting craft of the patrol, but he immediately dashed forward to give battle. The enemy waited the onslaught with dignified self-assurance. Then, suddenly, they found this 'mad' Britisher was performing the most unusual manœuvres over their heads. Flying by a rapid mental calculation—as was invariably his rule—he had realised that, hopelessly outnumbered though he was, he could yet save himself and the machines in his charge if he could climb to a certain position. This he proceeded to do, first baffling the enemy with a series of most unusual turns and dives.

At last he had climbed to the necessary altitude, and diving down on them, broke up their formation in hopeless disorder, engaging hotly with the nearest enemy craft. The latter plunged earthward, wreathed in smoke and flame. Ball followed to within 500 feet of the mouth of the German guns, to make sure it was wrecked.

Further on they encountered a large patrol of twelve German machines. Before giving the enemy time to think out a possible offensive, he repeated his former tactics, again breaking them up, and driving one

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down. One against twelve! Enemy reinforcements came speeding up. Turning, climbing, wheeling, diving suddenly this way, suddenly that, the tiny British machine kept them all at bay, and drove another, flaming, to the ground.

On another occasion he attacked a group of seven enemy machines single-handed. The leading machine he shot down, and went after the others, which were retiring hastily. Within ten yards of another enemy machine he opened rapid fire, and brought him down on the roof of a house in a village in our lines. He then returned to his aerodrome for more ammunition, and encountered three more fighting planes. These he drove to the ground in rapid succession. When, finally, his day's work was completed, he glided home, his craft riddled from nose to tail with over three hundred bullet holes.

Towards the end, the enemy, who both feared and respected this daring airman, laid many traps for his destruction. Far from avoiding them, however, he deliberately went out of his way to match his wits against theirs, always returning unscathed, and from being the victim added further victims to his own overgrowing total.

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Almost the last aerial battle in which Captain Ball took part occurred when he was out with a patrol squadron, which encountered a German machine, and, riddling it with bullets, drove it down.

Four red Albatross machines then came up, and a brother officer of Captain Ball, who may be called Captain X——, engaged one of them at close range. The German manœuvred for a favourable position, and his opponent dived and shook him off. Climbing again, Captain X—— pursued another of the red enemy squadron, and fought it for a considerable time, the German machine being outmanœuvred and sent crashing to earth.

Then Captain X—— engaged a third machine, but he was shot through the wrist, and the top of his control lever was carried away. Although suffering great pain, and further handicapped by the damage of his aeroplane, he succeeded in landing in the British lines without further injury, and then fainted.

Captain Ball had many thrilling fights during those last few days of freedom, bringing down three enemy machines and putting many others to flight. One day, while

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patrolling, he sighted two hostile craft, and, as he was fairly low, he flew away from them, climbing steadily. When the German aeroplanes were quite near his tail he swerved sharply, slid underneath one of his opponents, and turned on his machine gun. The German fell, out of control.

He then manœuvred in order to attack the second enemy machine, but it flew straight at him, firing steadily. Captain Ball returned the fire as the German came full tilt at him and a collision seemed inevitable, when the hostile machine suddenly went down. The engine of Captain Ball's machine was hit, and the pilot drenched with oil.

No other hostile aircraft were in sight, so he dropped and saw both German aeroplanes lying completely wrecked within four hundred yards of each other. As he came home he fell in with two other hostile aircraft, but as his ammunition was exhausted and his sights covered with oil, he reluctantly ‘put his nose down’ and returned to his aerodrome.

Captain Ball was killed and buried at Annoeullin (eleven miles south-west of Lille). He flew away in the twilight of a still summer's evening. But though his gal-

## Glorious Exploits of the Air

lant machine lies shattered in foreign soil and his poor maimed body lies beneath the earth, his glorious spirit still lives.

The record that is Britain's proud perquisite, the record that will inspire our youthful pilots to their great deeds of the future.









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